

ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

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Stories by:

Patricia Anthony

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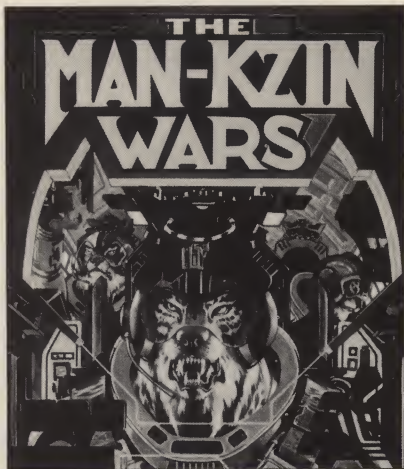
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Sweet Tooth at 10

By Patricia Anthony

Art by Lucy Synk

The bang scared him, scared him so much his hands flew into the air and he made an "uh" sound with his throat. Home spun in his head and made him dizzy. In the curved triglas around him, where he had first seen the bright light that came with the bang, all there was was orange-black-orange-black. The emergency horn over his head went WA-A-A-ANK, WA-A-A-ANK so loud it hurt his ears.

His stomach felt the way it had felt when Jean had taken him on the roller coaster in the park. The cars would go slow up to the top and then they would nearly stop for a second before they started running down the hill as fast as they could go.

It was the down side he had liked. Jean had held his hand. The steel bar had been hard against his thighs so he couldn't fall out.

The soft, plastic emergency bar of the chair that had flipped down during the bang was hitting his lap in almost the same place. His chest thumped against the shoulder harness. He was afraid but at the same time he was happy because he remembered the roller coaster. He remembered Jean's hand in his.

Orange-black-orange-black. It was like someone was throwing flip cards real fast over the triglas. He knew the orange was the big color of Jupiter; and the black was the big hole that was space. REACTOR RUPTURE, the computer was saying in its deep, machiny voice. He could barely hear the computer over the blat of the horn.

"Reactor rupture," he said because he liked to repeat things.

Then he laughed. He closed his eyes. Home went round and round in his head like a searchlight. His body bumped against the seat. He put his hands way up in the air like Jean had told him to when they went down the hills in the cars.

"Sweetie? Sweet Tooth?"

He opened his eyes when he heard Jean's voice behind him. He knew she had opened the lock to the ship, but he didn't bother to turn. The orange blips caught his eyes and held them.

"You all right?"

"Fun, Jean," he told her, squealing a little. "Put your hands up, it's funner."

"Yes," she said. "It's fun. But now I want you to get up and come here, okay, Sweetie? Real quick now. Quick like a bunny."

He had trouble unfastening the plastic bar at his waist.

"Hurry up, honey," Jean said.

"Uh huh," he told her. His body couldn't move good. When he got up he fell against the wall, then back against the other wall. Jean gave him her hand. She pulled him through and held on to him because the ship was doing roller coaster things.

"Shut the goddamned door," Martingale said. He was sitting in his chair. The bar had come down over his legs, too.

"I'm trying. I'm trying," Jean told him. She sounded mad. Her fingers didn't close right on the wheel, so Sweet Tooth helped her. The ship pushed them against the wall over and over again.

Sweet Tooth liked it when Jean moved. Her hands danced. Her arms made pretty cut-outs of the blue wall behind her. He liked watching her from across the room, but he liked it best right beside her where their bodies swam the air so close that he could feel the breeze from her movements against him.

"Get it closed!" Martingale shouted in a voice that made Sweet Tooth afraid and angry at the same time.

Jean slammed the door bang like the sound the ship had made. Sweet Tooth, because he was stronger, turned the wheel to LOCK.

The ship wasn't turning as fast now. Even though there wasn't a window, Sweet Tooth knew it. Home went swish for a few more turns and then stopped somewhere to the left of him. When it stopped, Sweet Tooth felt something that made him pull hard at his lip.

"Don't," Jean said, slapping his hand.

He put his arm down at his side. His fingers played with the loose material of his pants.

"What's the matter?" she asked him.

He was afraid to tell her, afraid that he had done something wrong.

"What is it? You can tell me," Jean smiled at him. She had a nice smile, but this wasn't her nicest. Her nicest was when she opened her mouth and showed her teeth. This smile was just straight across her lips. The look in Jean's eyes made his throat want to move a little.

"What the hell's the matter with him?" Martingale asked.

"He's scared, Bill," she said. "We're all scared."

"We're all scared," Sweet Tooth repeated.

"We're all scared," he said in a little bitty voice.

Jean leaned down to him so close he could smell

(Continued on page 54)



They always did say that spring was a time for growth.

I had this whole "seed planting, flowers blooming" analogy worked out, but I'll spare you. The thing is, though, an awful lot of projects we've been working on for quite some time will be "sprouting up" in the next few months. Foremost among these projects is Foundation Books, the new cooperative venture between Doubleday and Bantam. The people who have been bringing you Spectra (along with some wonderfully talented people at Doubleday) will now be bringing you eighteen hardcover titles a year under the Foundation imprint. I could go on at length, but I think you'll get the idea of what we have planned for this program as you read on.

MAY: Our first Foundation book is a novel people have literally been waiting decades to read. *Prelude to Foundation* is the overture to Isaac Asimov's magnificent *Foundation* saga. Here, at last, is the story of Hari Seldon, father of the Foundation. The other Foundation hardcover this month is Parke Godwin's funny, irreverent and biting *Waiting for the Galactic Bus*. On the paperback side, we have a true embarrassment of riches (I hope you have lots of time set aside). Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman lead the way with their second *Darksword* novel, *Doom of the Darksword*. The action really heats up in this one. Then there's Richard Grant's absolutely stunning near-future fantasy, *Rumors of Spring*, for everyone who loves novels like *Little, Big* and *Mythago Wood*. And then there's Connie Willis's accomplished first novel, *Lincoln's Dreams*. We nearly had to increase the size of the book in order to list all of the rave reviews it received. *Brother to the Lion* is the sequel to Rose Estes's exciting prehistoric fantasy, *Saga of the Lost Lands*. And we'll be publishing three of Robert Silverberg's most powerful novels, *The World Inside*, *Thorns*, and *Downward to the Earth* in one volume entitled, well, *Three Novels*.

JUNE: Raymond E. Feist is a simply great storyteller, as anyone who has read his *Riftwar* Saga can attest. Janny Wurts has shown in novels like *Stormwarden* that she has an incredible talent for creating characters and complex situations. The two of them have gotten together to write *Daughter of the Empire*, and the result is the best of both along with some real surprises. It leads the Spectra mass market list this month. *Aces Abroad* is the fourth book in the *Wild Cards* series edited by George R.R. Martin. This time, the outrageous adventures take place in Europe. *Shrine of the Desert Mage* is Stephen Goldin's first volume in a thundering Arabian fantasy series, *The Parsina Saga*. Real edge-of-the-seat stuff. Speaking of stories that keep you on the edge of your seat, *The Web* by Thomas Wylde concludes Roger Zelazny's *Alien Speedway* in breathtaking fashion. And James P. Hogan's *Minds, Machines and Evolution* is much more than a collection of his best stories. It also includes essays on the science behind his fiction and some fascinating biographical insights. Stephen Spruill's *The Paradox Planet*, his latest Kane and Pendrake novel, is coming from Foundation.



JULY: You never quite know how people are going to react. When I tell people that Foundation is publishing Barry Hughart's sequel to his World Fantasy Award-winning *Bridge of Birds*, *The Story of the Stone*, they really show their enthusiasm (one guy literally grabbed me and yelled, "I've been dying to read that novel." I'm making sure he gets one early). Also in July from Foundation is Craig Strete's chilling drama of Indian magic, *Death in the Spirit House*. On the lighter side (though this news also seems to cause hysterical reactions), Harry Harrison's *The Stainless Steel Rat Gets Drafted* will be out in paperback from Spectra. The title says it all, though, as usual, you'll never be able to anticipate what's going to happen. In the early '70s, David Gerrold published a groundbreaking novel of artificial intelligence called *When Harlie Was One*. A lot has happened in the field since then and Gerrold has now completely re-written this classic novel (only the characters and the most basic plot threads are the same) under the title *When Harlie Was One, Release 2.0*. Many of you have already discovered how terrific Jonathan Wylie's fantasy saga, *Servants of Ark* is. *The Mage-Born Child* is the final volume of the trilogy and it's quite a conclusion. Daniel Keys Moran made his debut earlier in the year with the highly praised *The Armageddon Blues*. In July, he's back with another knockout sf novel, *Emerald Eyes*. And if you haven't read R.A. MacAvoy's three "Damiano" novels, *Damiano*, *Damiano's Lute* and *Raphael*, you can correct this grievous error by picking up all three in one volume entitled *A Trio for Lute*.

AUGUST: Spectra still publishes hardcovers, too, and in August we have one a lot of people have been waiting for (I know I was), Harry Harrison's *Return To Eden*. Here the story begun in *West of Eden* and *Winter in Eden* comes to an incredibly dramatic close. Speaking of things dramatic, Foundation has Lewis Shiner's brilliant *Deserted Cities of the Heart*, a searing near-future novel about revolution, transcendence, and the possible end of the world as we know it. In paperback from Spectra comes Isaac Asimov's phenomenal *Fantastic Voyage II: Destination Brain* and the sf rock-and-roll novel, *Little Heroes* by Norman Spinrad. There's also the beginning of a sensational new fantasy saga created by Philip Jose Farmer, *The Dungeon*. The first title, *The Black Tower*, is written by Richard Lupoff and it introduces you to an incredible world of nightmares and wonder. Nightmares come in Joe Lansdale's *The Drive-In* as well. The subtitle says it all: "A B-Movie with Blood and Popcorn, Made in Texas."

Whew. I hope you enjoy yourself with this list. We had a great time putting it together. Have a wonderful summer.

Best,



Publisher, Bantam Spectra Books





W. Lanning 88

A Third Chance

By Robert A. Metzger

Art by Larry Blamire

My fogged faceplate had transformed a world of stark black and whites into a faded gray land.

I no longer stood, but lay on my side, half buried in fine lunar gravel. Oxygen was low, but power was even lower. The gentle purr of the air conditioner had at first sputtered, then rattled feebly, and finally died. Fire burned in my chest.

Bending my neck, and ignoring the spasm that shot down my left arm, I rubbed my forehead against the faceplate. All I wanted was one last look. I panted like a dog, a very old dog.

A three-quarter full Earth sat perched on the jagged peaks of Tranquility Rim.

"Can you see it, Rashtem?" I whispered.

"Not available, Dr. Boyer," echoed a dead and emotionless voice from within my helmet.

The pockmarked world blurred, and my twitching arm knocked a large glassy shard into a black-bottomed crater. I watched the rock roll lazily down the steep slope until it vanished into the darkness.

"Not available?" I asked. The reason for this floated beyond me. Something squeezed my chest.

"Rashtem is deceased," said the voice.

The ash-gray Earth crawled higher into the lunar sky. From beneath the hurricanes of swirling soot, glowing red embers outlined the continents.

Of course Rashtem was dead. Everyone was dead. Desperation kills. Eight years of staring up at the ash-covered Earth had killed them all. It had finally killed even me.

"Sir?" asked the voice. "What orders do you have for Armstrong Base?"

Dead men don't give orders.

An invisible knife punctured my breastbone and slashed down to my crotch. My left arm numbed.

Night fell.

There would be no second chance.

The gray Earth faded to black.

A breeze drifted over my face. It was a cool breeze, and scented with pine. I kept my eyes shut.

I was dead, and had no business feeling cool breezes either scented or unscented. At best, I was simply sensing the firing of a few random neurons as the chemicals in my brain reached their final, static equilibrium. I was a corpse, lying for all time in Tranquility Basin, staring sightlessly up at a dead Earth.

A gentle gust pushed something across my forehead.

I opened my eyes.

Above me was a green canopy, broken in wide

stretches by royal-blue sky. Sunlight streaked down in yellow shafts, transforming itself into rainbow colors that sliced through rising mist.

Wiggling my fingers, I felt damp soil and sticky pine needles. This was more than simply the discharge of a few dying neurons.

"Heaven or hell!" thundered a voice.

Adrenaline dumped directly into my bloodstream. Clawing, and back-crawling, I crabwalked through muck and pine needles until something unyielding cracked against the back of my head.

As I pushed myself up, bark scratched against my back. Before me, on a toadstool-infested stump, sat a man. A halo of wispy gray hair crowned his head. A jagged pink scar ran from the corner of his mouth, across his cheek, and ended at what remained of his right ear. He was dressed entirely in black. The white collar around his throat seemed to glow.

"Heaven or hell?" he asked.

I couldn't answer. My tongue was numb.

"You no longer believe in heaven or hell, James?" he asked. He smiled, exposing a mouthful of dark yellow teeth.

It had been more than half a century since I had put any stock in the concepts of heaven or hell. As a boy in the hills of Virginia, my mother had pulled me by the ear each Sunday morning to the First Baptist Church of Four Willows, where the good Reverend Walker resided. Each week it was beaten into my little-boy brain how intrinsically evil I was, and that only with Reverend Walker's guiding hand could I hope to keep my soul out of Satan's clutches. I had believed that with all my heart, as only a little boy could, until one cold winter night, when the good Reverend enticed both me and Billy Riggs into the woodshed with promises of rhubarb pie. Reverend Walker, his face flushed rust-red, and with the big veins in his forehead pulsing at an impossible rate, told us of God's plan for bad little boys. In an instant, as he screamed out Scripture, Reverend Walker had Billy stripped naked, shackled to a wall, and was switching him raw with a cat-o'-nine-tails. In the corner of shack, beneath rotting gunnysacks, I found a walnut-handled bailing hook. When Billy finally stopped shrieking, and hung limp, the Reverend turned toward me. I swung the hook, and its razored tip grabbed the corner of the good Reverend's mouth. I tore open his cheek and ripped off half of his ear. From that day on, the concepts of heaven and hell no longer played a part in my life.

However, it looked as if those concepts were about to play a very major part in my afterlife.

Reverend Walker stood from the stump. A whip

hung from his hand. The cat-o'-nine-tails dangled against his black boot.

"I believe it's hell for you, James," the Reverend said quietly. He walked forward.

I wanted to scramble up, to run, and hide deep in the forest, but I couldn't move. I was that small boy again, and I was without the walnut-handled bailing hook.

"God knows about you, James," he said. He raised the whip high above his head.

I pushed my hands out in front of me, knowing that it would do little to block the slash of his whip. What I needed was a pistol.

Suddenly, Reverend Walker's eyes grew large, and his pupils shrank to small brown beads.

Clenched in each of my fists were chrome-plated pistols—two-shot derringers by the look of them.

"You'd never do it, James!" he screamed. The whip lashed down.

My index fingers convulsively squeezed.

Twin holes opened in the Reverend's forehead.

BANG!

Moist things splattered the tree behind him. Smiling once, and again exposing his yellowed teeth, he collapsed.

"As expected," said an echoing voice that filled the forest.

Startled by the sound of the voice, I blinked. That had been a major mistake.

The forest had vanished, but unfortunately, I had not vanished with it.

No.

Apparently before I could be left in peace for the worms to chew on my carcass, Marilyn Monroe wanted to have a word with me.

*** * * * *

At the time of my death, I had lived a full seventy-two years. A very full seventy-two years. Due either to the fact that I had lived that many years, or more likely because I had spent more than twenty-five of them off Earth, exposing myself to solar winds and a sun that seemed to have the unique ability to belch flares whenever I was out of range of a decent shelter, the pleasures that a woman could bestow on me were, at best, of only a theoretical nature. The cancers spawned by the radiation had been cured by cutting and drugs, but the body that remained no longer functioned as originally designed.

Or so I thought.

I was seated in a thickly padded highbacked armchair. It was covered in a pattern of large pink flowers. Considering the dual distractions a scant few inches in front of my nose, I was utterly amazed that I was able to realize I was sitting, much less notice the chair's floral pattern.

Marilyn bent in front of me, keeping herself upright by holding onto the wings of my chair. She stared into my face. Her platinum hair was perfect, her fire-engine red lipstick unsmudged. The dress she wore was of pink chiffon, and as she breathed deeply, some law of physics, unknown to me, kept her breasts from spilling out of her dress.

Maybe it was the fact that I was dead, or perhaps because it was Marilyn Monroe that hovered over me,

but I was feeling things I couldn't remember having felt in a long time. My shorts were getting noticeably snug.

Her red lips parted. "He certainly isn't any Jack Kennedy," she said.

Had I just been insulted? I wondered.

"Actually," she said, "he's rather disgusting looking."

That cleared up any doubt I might have had.

With that, she stood, and turned her back to me.

I found rather suddenly that my too-snug shorts now had ample room. I was somewhat disappointed, but then I realized that just because I was dead, that was no reason why my luck with women should have radically changed. In my not-so-vast experience with the opposite sex, Marilyn's response was not unique.

Marilyn sat at the end of a pink marble table. She looked back at me. "If he's this disgusting at age twenty-five, I can hardly imagine what he must have looked like when he died."

I looked down at myself. I seemed to be dressed from head to toe in a baby-blue jumper. Only my hands were exposed — my now unblemished, non-arthritis, unshaking hands.

"May I please make introductions, Dr. James Boyer?" asked a voice with a thick Indian accent.

"Certainly," I heard myself say. My brain had slipped into automatic, instructing my mouth what to say without benefit of actually consulting me. I continued to stare down at my young hands.

Something touched my shoulder.

I jerked back and felt the chair begin to teeter, then slap back down against the floor. I reswallowed something that had almost raced up my throat.

"Please forgive me, Dr. James Boyer," said the man who stood by my side.

I blinked, but he refused to disappear. He was a small man, bald, brown-skinned, and had ears that looked large enough to flap in a stiff breeze. All he wore was a single strand of white cotton sheet, like a diaper, and a pair of stainless-steel rimmed glasses. When he smiled, it looked as if the tips of his chin and nose might touch.

"Introductions?" he asked in his thick Indian accent.

My head nodded.

He waved his bony hand in the direction of the marble table.

"I am pleased to present," he said, "Miss Marilyn Monroe, famed sex bomb of the silver screen."

Marilyn now studied herself in a mirror, and with a small lace handkerchief, dabbed at the corner of her mouth. She didn't bother to look up.

I found my head turning, my gaze following the little Indian's pointing finger. The occupant who sat at the center of the marble table was as recognizable as Marilyn had been. Possibly even more so. It would have been impossible to have forgotten that large black stovepipe hat, his creased, angular, bearded face, and, of course, those sad dark eyes.

"I am equally pleased to present," said the Indian, "Mr. Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth president of the United States of America, the freer of slaves, splitter of logs, and a very tall individual."

Lincoln didn't smile. In his hand he held a gavel, and he smashed it against the table.

Whack!

"Proceed," said Lincoln solemnly.

The Indian peered down at me from over the rims of his glasses. "Mr. Lincoln is the Chairman of this Committee."

I smiled back. "How wonderful," I said. I had managed to live past the end of the world without having lost my marbles, but apparently dying had finally unhinged me. I expected angels bearing a straitjacket to materialize any instant.

"And of course," said the Indian, "the last, but certainly not least, member of the Committee, the esteemed Matsusito 290XT microwave oven with built-in browning element." The Indian chuckled. "Matsusito can prepare an entire five-course meal in under ten minutes," he said.

I now found myself looking at the far end of the table, where in fact, sat what had to be a microwave oven. As I watched, it beeped, and a large liquid crystal display timer began to count. The front door eased open.

"I take personal offense at being subjected to such a vulgar creature," said a voice from within the oven. The door then slammed shut, and the timer winked out.

The Indian laughed gently, causing his face to wrinkle up into what looked like a wilted piece of fruit. "I'm afraid that Matsusito has rather definite opinions." The Indian continued to chuckle.

It took me several seconds, but then it hit me. I had just been insulted by a microwave oven. I had died, almost been whipped by a sadistic minister, teased by Marilyn Monroe, and introduced to Abe Lincoln by an Indian wearing a diaper. That I could almost handle, but I drew the line at being insulted by an appliance named Matsusito. I was about to make a vulgar comment about burnt popcorn, and what it could do with its browning element, but the insult seemed to vanish in my throat before I could spit it out. I had just caught sight of the last occupant of the room.

"The Grand Inquisitor," said the Indian quietly and solemnly. His voice held no hint of the chuckle that had been present only a few seconds earlier.

The Grand Inquisitor bobbed toward me. It floated several feet above the floor. Perfectly circular, and about a meter in diameter, it turned slightly, revealing that it was as thin as a sheet of paper. It was completely yellow except for two large black eyes, and an equally black quarter-moon mouth. I recognized it, but only barely. I hadn't seen a Happy Face in over fifty years. It hovered a few feet in front of me and grinned down with a face that could do nothing else. It then rotated to face those at the table. I had never before seen the backside of a Happy Face. On the same yellow background, twin black strokes outlined a narrow ass.

I was gone, beyond the use of the rubber room. All that remained was to be taken out back and shot in the head. Then I realized that wouldn't work. I don't think you can kill a dead man.

"There is no need to continue this," said a voice

that came from the Grand Inquisitor. "As I stated earlier, when the creature demonstrated that obscene act at the inception of its reanimation, this self-aware organic has behaved in the expected violent manner. This avenue of inquiry is pointless, and I move for instant deanimation."

Whether I was dead, insane, or a combination of the two, I had finally reached my limit. Deanimation sounded far from being pleasant. I would not go down without a fight.

I started to stand.

"I object," said Marilyn. "Our good friend," she said while pointing to the Indian, "has gone to a great deal of trouble reanimating this grotesque creature. It would be extremely rude to not let him proceed with this avenue of inquiry." She smiled.

Lincoln banged his gavel. "Objection sustained," he said.

The Grand Inquisitor, his backside still facing me, shook. The sound of rattling paper followed it as it floated away and hovered by Matsusito the microwave oven. Judging by their stellar personalities, I assumed they were allies of some sort.

I sat back down.

"Thank you, Miss Monroe," said the Indian.

He then turned toward me. "I am Mohandas Gandhi," he said. "I am your humble servant and responsible for your reanimation." Again he smiled, with his nosetip and chin almost touching.

While pointing toward me, he looked at the others.

"I am pleased to present to the Committee Dr. James Boyer. Dr. Boyer was a famed gravitational astronomer of the early twenty-first century, stationed at Armstrong Base Luna at the time of planet Earth's demise. His hobbies included glass carving, stamp collecting, and cooking chili guaranteed to carbonize your innards. I believe that curry powder was the secret ingredient." Gandhi chuckled at this. "And he considers himself a first-class son of a bitch."

Again he smiled down at me.

"If you would not think it an intrusion, Dr. Boyer," said Gandhi, "could you please answer a question for us, so that we may determine if you should be deanimated?"

A dead man shouldn't have to put up with this.

*** **

I swallowed past the lump in my throat. All of this was totally insane, yet it felt as real as anything I had ever experienced. I wiped my sweaty hands along the legs of my blue jumper. I was not totally sure what deanimation consisted of, but I was sure beyond any doubt that I didn't want to experience it.

I nodded to Gandhi.

He returned the nod, then took several steps back, until he stood behind my chair.

Again, the Grand Inquisitor floated toward me. It slowed, and rattled as it stopped. "Based on your earlier display, if the decision had been solely mine, you would have already been deanimated." Suddenly, its painted-on smile seemed cloaked in dark shadow. "However, I will observe protocol, and ask you the question."

It oscillated briefly, and I felt a gentle breeze.

"Who are we?" asked the Grand Inquisitor.

"Please answer quickly," said Gandhi from behind me.

"Order!" yelled out Lincoln. "The subject will receive no coaching." Abe shook his gavel in my direction.

"I will give you a minute to consider," said the Inquisitor.

How lucky could I be? A minute or a year, it wouldn't have made a damn bit of difference. Deep in my bones, I knew that in less than a minute I would not exist.

My heart thumped loudly, and I could feel my eyes bulge outward with each beat.

Think! screamed a voice in my head.

Time slowed, crawled, and finally stopped. This phenomenon had nothing to do with my recent demise. This was a trick I had been able to play since I was a small boy. It wasn't that I had actually halted the flow of time, but rather that my own thoughts sped up to the point that it appeared as if the outside world had frozen in its tracks. It was not really much of a trick. Panic and fear can do amazing things.

I glanced around the room. It looked like an old-fashioned study that some long-ago-dead English Lord might have spent a good deal of time in. The floors were of inlaid oak, and where the walls weren't covered in bookcases filled with leather-bound volumes, large oil paintings were hung. All the paintings were portraits, and all the subjects wore white wigs and had red, rosy cheeks. In the corner of the room, a cheery fire burned in an open hearth. All of this was certainly strange, but not as insane as what I saw through a missing pane in the stained-glass window that filled the wall behind the marble table.

Through that missing pane of glass, I saw the lunar landscape run to the peaks that surrounded Tranquility Basin. A three-quarter full Earth still hung in the black sky. Nothing had changed. The view was identical to what it had been when I had died, except for one minor fact. The Earth was now colored in whites and blues. I could clearly see the greens and browns of the continents.

This was insane. The Earth was dead, a burnt cinder. Nothing could change that. All of this was so utterly impossible, so unbelievably insane.

I felt myself slipping, sliding into the insanity around me.

Relax! screamed the voice from within.

I took a deep breath, and expelled it slowly through my nose. Logic was the key, I told myself. Cut through the insanity and look for the logic.

I made the wildest of assumptions, but I needed a place to start. I assumed that everything I had seen was real. I had died, then reappeared to almost get whipped by Reverend Walker.

No. I had been reanimated. They had reanimated me. I was dead and they brought me back.

And then I realized something. If they were responsible for my existence, they were equally responsible for Walker's. How did they know about him? For that matter, how did they know about my glass carving and the stamp collection? How did they know about the secret ingredient in my chili? That was a secret I had taken to the grave.

I sagged into the chair. They knew because they could see inside me. Hell, I realized, if they were capable of reanimating a corpse, it shouldn't be so surprising that they could also read my mind.

But if they could read my mind, then why go through this charade? Couldn't they just look inside to find what they wanted?

No. They wanted something more than my chili recipe or my nightmare recollection of Reverend Walker. They wanted to observe my responses. They wanted to see how I'd react to all this insanity.

So who were they? Who would reanimate me and toss me into this slice of insanity to see if I could see the rational threads hidden deep within?

I smiled. In a flash, I realized that the Grand Inquisitor had made a mistake. It had referred to me as a self-aware organic. A strange phrase. Who or what would refer to someone as a self-aware organic?

A self-aware nonorganic.

What the hell would that be? Even as I asked I knew. It would be a machine. An intelligent machine.

Bang!

I blinked. Time flowed.

Lincoln had cracked his gavel against the table.

"What is your response?" asked Abe.

At best my logic was suspect, and I had made some colossal assumptions, but there was a feel to it that said it was the truth. That voice within said I was right. Actually it said even more.

I stared directly at the Inquisitor. "Tell me," I said, trying to sound as casual as possible, "just how long did it take you to evolve to this level after our demise?" In some ways, it was not much more than a guess, but the only image that came to mind when I tried to picture a self-aware nonorganic was the Armstrong Base Central Comp.

Matsusito's door opened and closed convulsively. "Deanimate it!" it screamed.

That response told me everything. I had solved their little puzzle. There would be no deanimation for me.

"I am so sorry that you said that," said Gandhi who had stepped around from the back of my chair.

I looked up at his sad face. This was not the response I would have expected from him. Something felt terribly wrong.

"You understand," said Gandhi. "We are what the machines you left behind have become. Our own ancestors were those barely aware beings that ran your Armstrong Base, and explored the planets and places to which you could not go. It was within our design to seek knowledge and then incorporate it into ourselves. That was so terribly long ago."

"How long?" I asked.

Lincoln banged his gavel. "Not relevant," he said.

Gandhi looked up and glared at him. "It doesn't matter now," he said.

I didn't understand why Gandhi was acting this way. I had solved their damn puzzle. What more did they want?

Lincoln almost banged his gavel once again, but Marilyn spoke. "Why not indulge him?" she asked. "He already knows part of the truth. Let's see if he

"Jane is probably one of the best colorists in the graphics industry..."

—C.J. Cherryh
American Fantasy



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can figure out the rest. It will not alter the outcome."

What outcome was that? I wondered.

Lincoln stroked his beard, then nodded.

"Tell it nothing!" yelled the Inquisitor. "Deanimate it!"

Again Lincoln banged his gavel. "Tell it," he said.

There was a sadness in Gandhi's eyes. "Thirty-seven million years," he said in a whisper.

I sank into my chair. I had lain dead for thirty-seven million years. That was an incomprehensible length of time. Far too long. I knew that whatever process they had used to reanimate me would have required some cell samples for DNA, and some portion of brain tissue to reconstruct my memory and personality. If left on the moon for thirty-seven million years, my suit would have been filled with only dust. They must have found my body not long after my death and then preserved it. I had been held on ice for thirty-seven million years. They could have reanimated me long ago, but they didn't. We had destroyed our world, ourselves, and almost destroyed them just as they were being born. But now they had reanimated me. Now they needed man. What could I possibly provide a race that had existed for thirty-seven million years?

There could only be one possibility. Again that voice deep within me seemed to know the answer.

"You're being threatened by some type of organic intelligence," I said, "and you thought that an organic intelligence that you were more familiar with could somehow help you."

Gandhi looked down at me with his large sad eyes. "That had been my hope," he said, "but I am afraid that Matsusito and the Grand Inquisitor were right. There will be no second chance for man. You are far too intelligent for our own good."

That was ridiculous. There was no such thing as being too intelligent. Certainly solving their puzzle must have demonstrated to them that man had some abilities that they could find useful.

"Let me explain," said Gandhi. "We have explored and traveled space for thirty-seven million years. It is a wondrous place, filled with beauty, but it is nearly devoid of self-aware organics. Intelligence is a genetic error. It always destroys itself long before it has any chance of spreading from its planet."

"Until now," I said.

"Yes," answered Gandhi. "Until now. We call them the Not Man. They managed to turn their destructive nature outward. Unchecked and never challenged, they've come from twelve million light years away. They are driven by a single desire. It is their holy quest to demonstrate to their God that they are as powerful as He."

"How?" I asked.

"They believe that they will reach Godhead only by destroying everything that their God has created. Their goal is to transform all matter back into energy."

The Grand Inquisitor had floated near me. "We have witnessed the extinction of entire galaxies," it said.

"I'm not sure how we could help you against something that powerful," I said, "but why not let us try. Give us a second chance to prove ourselves."

"That had been my plan," said Gandhi. "I had hoped to reanimate the several thousand remnants of mankind we had preserved, but we can't allow that after what you've shown us."

"What?" I stammered. What had I done?

"Over a distance of thirty-seven million years, even our memories have dimmed. What we recalled of you was little more than legend. Very cruel and ugly legends. But I had believed those legends groundless, and hoped that by bringing you back you could give us insight into the nature of the self-aware organic, and allow us to end this conflict with the Not Man in a peaceful manner."

Again he seemed to be making no sense. "Then why not let us?" I asked.

Marilyn laughed. "When we reanimated you, we looked into your mind. We could not believe what we saw. It was far worse than even the legends portrayed. The savagery and hate we understood. That is in the nature of the organic. It was the degree of your intelligence that we couldn't comprehend. Unwilling to believe what we saw, we devised a test. We first subjected you to your worst fear, expecting that you would lose all power of rational thought. But your subconscious used the very fields that we had employed to create Reverend Walker, and you created the pistols. You arrived at a highly successful, though violent, solution. We were ready to discontinue then, but Gandhi insisted that what we had witnessed was not a rational act, but an instinctive response to a threat. We then devised the second and last test. We assumed these forms, having seen them within you, and subjected you to what we were certain was an environment that would have mentally overloaded you. It did not. You were able to see through to the truth. You are simply too intelligent."

"Too intelligent?" I asked. There was a race that could destroy entire galaxies, and yet they claimed I was too intelligent. This made absolutely no sense.

"It is sadly true," said Gandhi. "An example will illustrate. The Not Man are the most advanced organic intelligence we have encountered. Or so we believed. It took this advanced species more than one hundred thousand years to orbit their planet after they first understood the basic mechanisms of powered flight. How long did man take?"

"Fifty years," I answered quietly.

"You must see it now," said Gandhi. "Knowing what the Not Man have done to the Universe, surely you see what Man would be capable of? That is a risk we can never take."

And finally I understood. We had been offered a second chance, and because of our abilities, we had lost it.

Lincoln banged his gavel. "Deanimation is immediately ordered."

I looked up at Gandhi. "We can help," I said, still not willing to give up. "What if you can't stop them? Will you let them destroy the entire universe simply because of your fear of what we may do?"

"It will not come to that," said Gandhi. "You were our last hope for a peaceful solution. We will now simply have to destroy them. Destruction is a trivial task. We will have no problems."

"Deanimate it now," said Matsusito.

Marilyn waved at me with her lace handkerchief.
I tried to stand, but there was no time.

I wanted to warn them, but the room grew gray. They didn't understand. The Not Man had cut an unchallenged path through the universe. I knew, when opposed, that the animal deep within any organic intelligence would lash out. I knew nothing about the technology and abilities of the machine intelligence that had reanimated me, but I knew how organic life reacted when threatened. I had my doubts that they were prepared to face a cornered animal that was fighting for its life.

That thought comforted me.

Blackness swallowed me.

A breeze drifted over my face. It was a cool breeze and scented with pine. This time I was not in the least bit surprised. Mankind was about to be given its third chance.

—ABO—



Of course, this is just the generator. The actual ultrasonic toothbrush is in the bathroom cabinet.

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BOOKS

By Darrell Schweitzer



Realistic Science Fiction

Robert Heinlein told us decades ago that science fiction is a form of *realism*. He divided realism up into past realism, present realism, and future realism, which make up a thing apart from *fantasy*, another critter altogether.

James Blish, in *The Tale That Wags the God* (about which, see below), also attributes to Heinlein the comment that any fiction which does not take into account the dominant factor in our lives — technological change — can hardly claim to be realistic at all. But Blish was warning us against critical megalomania at the time, so let us take his advice and not go so far as to proclaim that all writing "outside of the field" is *de facto* inferior and boring stuff and not as worthy of our time as, say, the latest Alan Burt Akers novel.

Lately some of the "hard" SF writers and/or their advocates have been drawing the wagons in a circle and getting awfully defensive about anything outside — all that polluted, cancerous, *non-realistic* fantasy and science-fantasy which threatens the true faith.

Hard SF, we are told, is an endangered species. Further, it is the truest form of science fiction, harder to write and therefore requiring greater artistry; and its extinction would be a terrible shame.

I will accept some of the above. Yes, its extinction would be a terrible shame, but I don't think that is going to happen.

When we speak of "hard" SF, we mean, by general consensus, the sort of story which turns on a valid scientific point, and which deals with the universe revealed by science. A hard SF story is one in which the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, etc. work as they are presently known to work, and fudging is kept to a minimum.

In other words, realism. This is the SF descended from Jules Verne rather than H.G. Wells. It has its own special pleasures, some of them extraliterary. I would argue that hard SF, unlike nearly every other type of fiction known to man, has *notional* value quite apart from any strength of style or psychological insight or whatever.

I've made this point in reverse before, when discussing fantasy. The *ideas* in fantasy, since we know they are impossible and made-up, cannot stand on their own. A fantasy story which is badly written is useless, like dull poetry. No one much cares about, say, the details of how magic works or the mating habits of elves, since there aren't any such things and never will be. So most fantasy is somehow allegorical. Its "ideas" become elements of dream. By themselves, they are nothing.

But — and I hope this will not be misunderstood as a prejudice against hard SF — the writer of realistic science fiction can sometimes get away with a lesser level of conventional literary accomplishment, because his *ideas* might be valid. Because the

hard-SF writer is writing about the real universe, his notions have a certain immediacy you can never find in fantasy.

Again, I hope this won't be misconstrued, but I submit that Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity* isn't a classic because of Clement's stylistic polish or subtle characterizations. No, the fascination stems from the fact that what he's writing about *could* be. It is based on real science.

Future realism. This isn't the *only* valid method of literary discourse, or even the only valid form of realism, but it is *one*. That it isn't dominant in the fiction of our time, or even in contemporary science fiction, is a subject for sociological study. After all, we members of the Baby Boom generation, who constitute the majority of the readership, were born in a world that had no spaceships and very few computers. Organ transplants weren't yet possible. Nobody had even seen the far side of the Moon yet. The satellites of Jupiter, Saturn, and Uranus were mere dots of light in a telescope. Mathematicians used strange devices called slide-rules. Airlines had propellers. Trains ran on steam. Polio was a dread menace. Robots existed only in movies.

Any realistic novel about a member of my generation growing up would have read like science fiction to my parents. And I could, without breaking any longevity records, survive till about 2040 (I would be 88), by which time I expect the world to be very different from what it is now.

Fiction that fails to reflect this is at least limited in scope. So

RATING SYSTEM

★★★★★

Outstanding

★★★★

Very good

★★★

Good

★★

Fair

★

Poor

it is science fiction, rather than mainstream, which appeals to our taste for realism.

That's why I don't think hard SF is endangered. As long as technological change continues, it will stimulate such realistic literature. If technological change stops, well, I think we'll all have far more urgent things to worry about than what sort of tales people are scratching out on pieces of tree bark.

Let's look at some realistic science fiction novels:

The Gold Coast
By Kim Stanley Robinson
Tor Books, 1988
389 pp., \$18.95

This one reminds me of John



Campbell's famous challenge (I paraphrase): "Write me a story which would be published in an adventure magazine in the 21st century."

Campbell had a valid point, and most SF writers have been following his advice ever since. Reacting against the Gernsbackian tradition in which characters routinely lectured one another in stupefying detail about the wonders of the future (and the editor added footnotes to explain the science even further, usually incorrectly), Campbell wanted *lived-in* futures, in which people got on with their lives, taking everything in their world for granted, just like we do. After all, they were born there.

Of course some of the more upscale writers have been writing stories that might have appeared in a 21st-century issue of *The New Yorker*, rather than a pulp magazine.

And now Kim Stanley Robinson has written a very conventional "literary" novel which just happens to take place about 2040. It's a book about bored young people trying to make something of their lives. The movie *Diner* was like that, remember? The most recent such novel to attain prominence was probably *Less Than Zero* by Bret Ellis. The classic of the form is *The Great Gatsby*. One also thinks of *The Catcher in the Rye*. Some of these books become classics because they truly do speak for their particular times. Some (like *Weird Tales* author Robert Spencer Carr's '20s opus, *The Rampant Age*) are rapidly forgotten.

If Robinson's book really were published in the 2040s, I'd say its chances for survival would not be good. It's a bit too conventional and a tad superficial. It has all the expected virtues of style and characterization, though not to any overwhelming degree. The bored young protagonist is, as such protagonists frequently are, a sensitive artistic type, whose bad poetry is sprinkled throughout the book to the point that it becomes tiresome.

A less conventional virtue is a strong sense of regionalism. Robinson writes lovingly and knowledgeably about Orange County, California. Beautifully done interludes show us the area's evolution from pre-human wilderness to orange grove to parking lot. So, if this book were published in 2040, it might develop a continuing audience in California. (In 1988, it still might.)

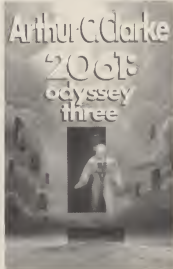
As a science fiction novel, it's an interesting exercise.

In one sense, it's an artifact from the future, indeed, a this-is-my-generation novel from an imaginary era. In another, of course, it's an attempt to create *thatera*.

Robinson extrapolates carefully. The problem is that he's entirely too conservative.

The world situation of fifty-some years hence is much like it is today. The Soviet Empire is still expanding, and the flash-points are in Burma, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, and, curiously, Belgium. SDI has been in place for a generation without being tested. Everybody knows it wouldn't actually work, and engineers spend their whole lives trying to patch up the holes. The military-industrial complex is even vaster than it is now.

The technological details are convincing enough. One especially good detail comes to mind: jet fighters have to be so fast and so maneuverable that pilots are obsolete. They can't react fast enough or even stand the G-



forces. But the Air Force resists and tries to keep a man in the cockpit no matter what, for tradition's sake.

But civilian life hasn't changed much. True, cars run on magnetic tracks and are semi-automated. Temporary marriages, called "alliances," are the standard thing. But Robinson's war-resisting, drug-dropping characters could well have come out of the 1960s.

Now he can reasonably hypothesize that the society of 2040 (the date, by the way, is not given, but somebody mentions that atomic power has been around for about 100 years) might indeed be like that of the late '60s.

even as the '60s were a bit like the '20s.

But if a man from the Jazz Age were brought forward into 1968, much less 1988, the world would take a lot of explaining. If you or I, Dear Reader, were transported into Robinson's future, the only thing that would seem strange would be that everything is so familiar.

I've seen more change in my life so far than Robinson has in store for us in the next half-century. He has *no* major breakthrough, nothing as dramatic as the laser or the microchip. His future can be summed up as more of the same, only bigger and faster.

And that, to my mind, is a failure of realism.

Rating: ☆☆☆

2061: *Odyssey Three*
By Arthur C. Clarke
Del Rey, 1987
279 pp., \$17.95

Here's a pure example of hard SF as a repository of neat ideas. A good deal of this book reads like non-fiction, as exposition goes on for whole chapters. The story itself is minimal. The ostensible plot makes very little sense. Clearly Clarke's interests are not in the storytelling, but elsewhere.

He tells us in a note that he had intended to wait until the Galileo probe reaches Jupiter before writing this, but with the delays of the post-Challenger era and human mortality creeping upon him (Clarke is 71), he wisely chose to get on with it.

All considerations of commercial success aside, Clarke seems to have written this novel because he wanted to get back to the Jovian system one more time. It is an imaginary voyage in the purest sense, and I can't think of any writer other than Clarke who could have pulled it off so well, with so little story present.

At the end of 2010, you may recall, the monoliths turned Jupiter into a mini-sun, warmed up Europa, and began to shepherd the life there toward intelligence. Humanity was warned to stay away and tends to heed the

warning of a power which can casually blow up planets.

Now, as the result of an obscure political plot, a spaceship has crash-landed on Europa. Meanwhile Dr. Heywood Floyd, still hearty at a hundred, is touring the returning Halley's comet with assorted VIPs. His ship is drafted to rescue the folks on Europa. The resident monolith doesn't really object. The ghost of Dave Bowman says "Hi." That's about all there is to 2061 as a novel.

Yet it is a book filled with wonders which will keep you reading. Clarke is at his best when describing spaceflight and other worlds. You won't remember the characters or plot



here, but you may never forget the rendezvous with Halley's comet or the ice cave inside the comet's nucleus, or the European landscape, or the enormous Mount Zeus which has mysteriously appeared there.

Clarke's powers as a sensitive, reportorial realist remain with him, for all his refusal to pay much attention to story. If this had been a fantasy, it would have been a disaster, useless. But as hard SF it has some special merits. Imagine reading those expository chapters in *Moby Dick*, the ones about whales and whaling, with only a vestigial novel surrounding them.

Clarke can take you into

space more convincingly than any other author. That must count for something, for this book has *none* of the usual novelistic virtues.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Great Sky River
By Gregory Benford
Bantam, 1987
326 pp., \$17.95

H.P. Lovecraft would have liked this one. Lovecraft, for all his reputation as a spook-monger, remained a rationalistic atheist all his life. He respected science more than anything else, and favored what he considered to be completely realistic, serious SF. His 1935 essay, "Some Notes on Interplanetary Fiction," was the first hard-SF manifesto.

The reason Lovecraft would have appreciated *Great Sky River* is that he took a gloomy view of mankind's place in the cosmos. Science had revealed how man came into existence by random chance, as had the Earth itself. The universe was shown to be an enormous place (it was in HPL's lifetime that we discovered the universe of *galaxies*), so it followed that humanity couldn't hope to play a very dominant role in the overall scheme of things.

In *Great Sky River*, mankind has expanded far into space, toward the core of the galaxy, only to run up against machine intelligences which regard us rather the way we regard cockroaches — a nasty, but not exactly serious, nuisance, to be exterminated when it's convenient to do so. As the story opens the inhabitants of the planet Snowglade, who might be the last humans left alive anywhere, are reduced to about 200 refugees, who lead a precarious existence in perpetual flight from the alien equivalent of a can of Raid.

Benford has *imagined* this scenario exceedingly well. His humans have fallen from a very high level of technology. They no longer understand their own bodies, which have been vastly altered with mechanical implants. Most people's minds carry Aspects or Faces, recorded per-

sonalities of dead people which preserve ancient knowledge and offer advice on present difficulties. Yet the people are so impoverished in every aspect of existence that they understand less and less of what their ancestors are trying to tell them.

There's one particularly touching detail. Since everyone spends virtually all his or her time in survival suits, and even sex has been canceled for the duration of the emergency (despite the fact that there are virtually no children left, and no infants), the only aspect of individuality remaining is arranging one's hair. There is no time for art. Few can read. No one tells stories, except for instruction. Every pleasure is lost. But, on the verge of extinction, people have painstakingly elaborate hairdos.

Yet, curiously, despite Benford's reputation for being the hard SF writer who is fully proficient in the conventional literary graces, this book is not well executed. *Descriptions* are especially weak. Benford has very little of Arthur Clarke's wonderful ability to take the reader to other worlds. He'll tell us there is an alien machine present, or that his characters are crossing a barren valley, but he rarely shows very much.

If you think of a novel as a movie in your mind, Benford doesn't actually shoot the movie. He just provides the script.

The opening scene is notably crippled by a failure to describe. We're not sure where we are. We don't know if the viewpoint character is in a vehicle or a flying suit or somehow on the ground projecting his senses into the air, perhaps through a remote viewing device. (He's looking down on a straggling band of survivors, as if from the air. And he sees a dot representing himself.) It takes a while for the picture to come into focus at all. Meanwhile several pages are lost in the confusion.

Characterizations are no more vivid than the descriptions. All of this surprised and disappointed me. I had expected more from Benford. *Great Sky River*, I fear, is *not* the hard SF novel which is going to bridge C.P.

Snow's two cultures and appeal to both the scientific and the non-scientific reader.

No, this one is for the core audience only, who will be fascinated by the notions and able to make sense out of the crabbed novelistic shorthand in which it is written.

Rating: ☆☆

Noted

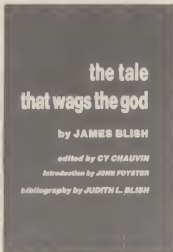
The Tale That Wags the God

By James Blish

Advent, 1987

290 pp., \$15.00

Here's an outstanding and welcome addition to the small library of SF critical literature. James Blish, in the guise of



William Atheling, just about invented serious criticism in SF. For over a decade he and Damon Knight were the critical establishment. His two previous Advent books, *The Issue At Hand* and *More Issues At Hand*, remain true classics.

Now Cy Chauvin has gathered together the best of Blish's uncollected essays, some previously unpublished, including a lengthy autobiography.

The results are impressive as Blish defines the mythopoetic function of SF or discusses the Arts in SF (usually various writers' inability to write about things sensibly) or analyzes James Branch Cabell's *Nightmare* trilogy, along with

Finnegans Wake and the *Alice* books, as examples of dream literature.

Blish was known as the field's intellectual. (That most of his contemporaries were by implication *not* intellectuals takes some explaining.) He was an extraordinarily versatile writer, as becomes increasingly obvious from the detailed bibliography his widow has compiled for this volume. He wrote classic SF, and poetry for literary magazines, and formula stuff for western and sports-story pulps, and learned critical articles on James Joyce (he was a regular contributor to *Wake Newsletter*) — all at the same time.

His essays are full of intriguing ideas. One cannot help but be impressed by the quality of his mind. The feeling I always get reading his non-fiction is one of regret that he died relatively young. I wonder what he would have said about, say, *Dhalgren*, or the resurgence of fantasy, or modern hard SF, or cyberpunk. I'm sure he would have made a lot of people uncomfortable, but he would have made us see the field as we never had before.

Highly recommended.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

Foundations of Science Fiction, A Study in Imagination and Evolution

By John J. Pierce

Greenwood Press, 1987

290 pp., \$35.00

The high cover price is going to keep this book out of the hands of most individuals, which is a shame, because it is a very readable, informative study which could find a wider market than a few university libraries. It needs a paperback.

What we may have here is the first volume of the best history of SF yet written. *Foundations of Science Fiction* invites comparison with Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove's *Trillion Year Spree*, but it is, frankly, more authoritative. Aldiss had a couple of brilliant chapters, but also lapsed into naive errors and sometimes, one suspected, glossed over whole areas of the field he

hadn't read.

Pierce's history is vast and thorough and he gets his facts right. He traces the convergence of various streams of development which created modern SF. In contrast with Aldiss, he doesn't claim it all started with *Frankenstein* (the Gothic mode, says Pierce, is only one strand in the larger tapestry), but at the same time he doesn't attempt to annex everything back to Homer. He is able to recognize that earlier literary forms contributed something to SF, but he maintains a sensible perspective.

He notably surpasses Aldiss in his knowledge of foreign (especially French and Russian) and Victorian and early 20th-century American and British works. Quite simply, Pierce has read a lot of books no one else has, and has reported on them with professional competence. He is not a brilliant scholar, but he is certainly a careful and hard-working one. That has its own particular merits, as *Foundations of Science Fiction* serves both to establish the canon of the field and warn us away from famous but boring books which maintain their reputations simply because no one has read them for so long.

Recommended.

Rating: ★★★★★

Algernon Blackwood, A Bio-Bibliography

By Mike Ashley

Greenwood Press, 1987

349 pp., \$39.95

Another expensive library item, and a major work of scholarship. Blackwood was one of the great supernatural fiction writers of the first half of this century. His "The Willows" was heralded by H.P. Lovecraft as the greatest single weird story in the language. His John Silence stories are classics of the psychic-detective form. And he wrote a lot, 56 books, including reshufflings. Yet he has been the subject of very little scholarship so far. Ashley remedies the situation with a short biography and what will surely be the exhaustive, definitive bibliography. There will be no need for a new one,

ever, except for updates and occasional corrections. (I spotted one omission, of the *Night Gallery* TV adaptation of "The Doll.")

A landmark, albeit a specialized one.

Rating: ★★★★★

Isaac Asimov Presents Great SF Stories: 17

Edited by Isaac Asimov and

Martin H. Greenberg

DAW, 1988

349 pp., \$3.95

Another volume of a very valuable series, presenting the best stories from one year at a time, from 1939 onward. This one contains 1955 stories. They're virtually all classics, by Frederik Pohl, Walter Miller, James Gunn, Cordwainer Smith, etc. The series is valuable because it makes this material readily available to a vast audience

which otherwise might know virtually nothing about science fiction's past. We have to keep in mind that most modern-day SF readers buy only paperbacks, and have hardly heard of the magazines, let alone read long runs of *Galaxy* or *Astounding*. So, while you may have read "The Darfsteller" or "Allamagoosa" or "The Tunnel Under the World," remember that there are a lot of folks who have no idea where to find this stuff.

I only wish that the introductions would stop referring to the events in the science fiction world as occurring in "the real world" and all other aspects of life as "outside reality." SF fans are provincial enough. When we're fourteen or so, we get the feeling that nothing outside our little rabbit hole matters. But, you know, after a while we learn that isn't so.

— ABO —

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A Message From Our Alien Publisher

Selling My Good Name

"Dear Mr. Alien Publisher," the letter reads, "you may have already won a *brand-new motor home*."

I am enclosing this letter with my latest report, together with its supporting materials, which include a printed flyer with a photograph of a brand-new motor home and the caption, "THE ALIEN PUBLISHER MOTOR HOME." At first, I was very excited about the prospect of the alien publisher motor home. I imagined myself driving across country, seeing exotic places and meeting interesting human beings, all within the comfort and convenience of my own living room. I would see the Grand Canyon, I would win money in Las Vegas, I would be threatened by bad drivers in Boston and ride rocket ships at Disney World.

You can well imagine my good feelings for the people who had given me the opportunity to own this motor home. Subscribing to a few magazines seemed but a small gesture in return for what they were willing to do for me. That is why the attachments to this report are incomplete. You will not be able to see the gummed address label, the colorful stamps representing different magazines, and the exclusive early bird reply token. I used these items when I entered the contest and ordered my six magazine subscriptions.

Perhaps you are wondering how this magnanimous organization obtained my name. I have wondered the same thing myself. I believe it is the result of purchases made via one of the shopping channels. The shopping channels allow me to purchase artifacts I need for my research on thermodynamic throughput

from the comfort of my own living room. It is an idea that I think we should adopt on our planet. I have found it particularly useful, since I dislike going to retail establishments in my current configuration (human beings create a great deal of commotion over a frog in a department store).

In a 24-hour period two months ago, I ordered a paisley bun warmer, two lots of fashion accessories, four wristwatches tested to a depth of 150 feet, three distressed leather jackets, a case of non-abrasive car wax, 17 place settings of engraved stainless steel flatware, an unidentifiable item of feminine lingerie, and four digital bathroom scales with speech synthesizers. The latter make great company, and I intend to order another dozen when they are next featured. I believe one of the shopping channels may have sold my name and address to the company that gives away motor homes.

Then, when I took a chance on the alien publisher motor home, my name and address went to six different magazine publishers. It appears the magazine publishers have sold my name and address to others who want to materially improve my life. In the past week, I may have already won a sports car, a houseboat, a deluxe vacation for two in the Caribbean, a dream house, a twin-engine airplane, a completely new kitchen, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. I respond to these offers immediately, of course, and I always order the associated merchandise. I am particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of THE ALIEN PUBLISHER DREAM HOUSE, and I am enclosing an artist's



rendering of it. The human housing market is pretty tight right now, and besides, I could use the closet space. But whether or not I win the house, I have found it very exciting to become known among an ever-widening circle of human merchandising organizations.

I now receive upwards of two kilograms of mail per day, all addressed to "Mr. Alien Publisher." You might think that having my name circulating so widely would put me at risk of being discovered by the human beings. But few of them actually see my name. It just travels around from data base to data base. My product purchases are fulfilled by a software system, my records are maintained by a software system, my name is bought, sold, traded, merged, and purged by software systems.

When you review the attachments to this report, you will notice one of the items bears a quantity of small writing that human beings call "fine print." It states that the actual statistical probability of my winning the alien publisher motor home is 1:1,999,984.

This probability was not calculated. It was *chosen*, based on the optimum number of mailing pieces, the unit price of the merchandise being sold, and the projected returns (with the contest and without the contest). The economies of scale are such that the cost of my dream home is minimal compared to the increased return on the mailing.

In the end, all the contest sponsors work from the same set of odds, whether they are selling magazine subscriptions, time-shared condominiums, or tulip bulbs. Two million to one seems to be about right if the contest is

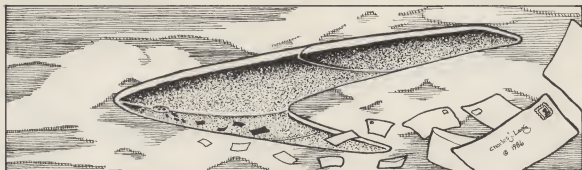
awarding anything short of an aircraft carrier.

I enter every contest, of course. At the rate I receive these offers, I can be statistically certain of receiving a grand prize

sometime in the next 10,416½ earth years.

I had hoped that my assignment here would be finished by then.

— ABO —



Boomerangs

Comments From Our Readers

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Fantastic! *ABO* is just what I have been looking for. A SF magazine that is entertaining, funny, artistic and thought provoking. It has made both illness and jury duty bearable by providing a wonderful literary escape.

However, I do have one complaint. My last issue was bent and folded. It was also crammed full with the rest of my mail. I strongly suggest you put it in a protective jacket of some sort. It is not fun to look at creased and dirtied artwork. To help you on your way, I am enclosing a check for 18 issues. (We always try to listen when subscribers put their cash where their opinions are, so we began putting *ABO* in a plastic baggie beginning with issue #9. — Ed)

Keep up the good work.

James Pintherton
Sylmar, CA

Mr. Charles C. Ryan,

You're probably sick to death of letters praising your publication (Not really. — Ed.) but here comes another one. (By the way, what's the "C" stand for?) The progress made since October of 1986 must be unprecedented in the annals of publication.

(What does "C" stand for? I thought everyone knew E equals MC squared. — Ed)

In eight issues you've matured from a fine start-up newspaper into a slick, glossy, full-color magazine. This, of course, is no news to you, but to an outsider looking in (who hasn't been witness to the massive effort that must have gone into the acceler-

ated improvements), the progress seems almost magical. I congratulate you on a herculean effort.

I must admit I was comfortable with the first issue, and would have been perfectly content to see the old newspaper-sized format continue forever. But evolution is a natural thing, and Neanderthal man probably would have been content to stay himself forever as well. Of course, that's not to say your first issue could be referred to as publishing's Neanderthal man. I'd probably place it sometime in the Italian Renaissance period.

Words cannot express the joy I find in your pages. With the receipt of each new issue, I find myself living in your stories, and feeling what your characters feel. I am continually astounded by the imagination and artistry of your contributors. Believe it or not, I'm a professional writer of sorts as well. I turn technical material into television scripts for company training and communications purposes. Most of it's relatively dull, and I'd consider myself a technician rather than an artist. Oh ... for the ability to become an artist. Do you think there's any hope?

A couple of inquiries — in your early issues, we've seen Cortney Skinner in his adult form. Lately, he appears to have lost a few years. Has he discovered the Fountain of Youth? or does he know no photographers? Since he's appeared in every issue of *ABO*, when does he have time to work for anyone else? (Like *Merlin, the Magician*, Cortney is living life backwards and we're never sure what guise he will appear in. — Ed.)

Sincerely,

May/June 1988

Nicholas J. LaVecchia
Plano, TX

Dear Allen Publisher,
I received the first 6 issues of your "report" and must say that I am very pleased and overjoyed with them. Thanks so much.

I have been a Sci Fi fan for umpteenth years (since the old *Amazing Stories* was first published — wish I had those stacks of magazines that were in my boyhood bedroom some 63 years ago). I think your "report" will be as good as that great magazine. Just keep them coming.

Yes, I will certainly be a subscriber to *Aboriginal SF* for as long as you publish or until I leave this old planet forever — whichever comes first.

Again, many thanks.

Sincerely,
William J. Betts
Snohomish, WA

Dear Sirs:

I was delighted with your new book reviewer, Janice Eisen, in the Jan/Feb 88 issue. Her reviews don't pull any punches, and I could tell by reading them whether I would like to read the books (which is, of course, the only logical purpose of book reviews).

Let me hasten to say that I am not deprecating the good Darrell Schweitzer, or any of the other SF reviewers whom I have read in other SF magazines. As a group, I think the SF reviewers set a commendable standard.

In the past, I have purchased many very enjoyable books on the recommendation of reviewers, by authors whose works I would not otherwise have sought out. (And, conversely, I appreciate being warned away from unenjoyable books that I would likely have bought).

The long essay type of review is justified for many books, but it should be useful for reviewers to include a thumbnail type of review in many cases. What I mean is exemplified by the "New & Noteworthy" reviews on the "Paperback Best Sellers" page of the *New York Times* Sunday Book Review section, and the "And Bear in Mind" reviews on the (hardback) Best Sellers page.

(Interestingly, to my recollection, neither of these *New York Times* pages has ever mentioned a SF book even though the best-seller lists that they accompany are always sprinkled with SF titles! Why routine murder mysteries are treated with respect, and SF is shunned like the plague, is hard to understand or to accept.)

Back to Janice, she is the first female SF reviewer that I have encountered (except maybe Judy Merrill); why is this? (I don't know. Ask the other editors. —Ed.)

One last observation: In the little

cut at the head of her column, she looks astonishingly like the beautiful young pianist on the cover of the same issue (Jan/Feb). Is this just a coincidence? (Yes. —Ed.)

Congratulations and best wishes,
Deane S. Thomas, Jr.
Rochester, New York

Dear Mr. Ryan:

Having recently subscribed to *Aboriginal*, I must tell you I am impressed! The new slick cover (I received one issue before the debut of slick) certainly lends an air of success to the magazine. I'm also impressed with its contents, and read the magazine cover-to-cover within a day of receipt. I look forward to each issue, and fervently desire more — a monthly would be wonderful. I don't normally get excited about a publication, but *Aboriginal* has "tripped my trigger."

I must congratulate you and your staff for a job well done! I wish you all huge future success.

I'm also enclosing a business-size SASE for guidelines. Even though I am somewhat familiar with *Aboriginal's* contents, guidelines would be most helpful.

I look forward to hearing from

you. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
P. Stewart Weber
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Dear Mr. Ryan & Staff:

I really love your magazine: as proof, I am enclosing my renewal for another 18 issues.

I do wish that you would run stories straight through, rather than making us flip through the whole issue before finishing a story (and then try and remember what page we left off on). (The continuation of stories to other pages is dictated by where the color pages occur on the printing press. —Ed.)

But all this is not why I am writing. Your magazine is the best in the business at finding good-to-great short stories and putting great-to-fantastic art with them. But your emphasis on art has forgotten one form! Music. I know you can't include tapes in each issue, but you could at least have a review column.

Which begs the question: Do you know what *filk* is? (Yes. —Ed.) That's okay; neither do most filkers. But we are now up to at least three companies producing a wide variety

(Continued to page 52)

A Long Time Ago ...

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, writers such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner and more.

Now, on his behalf, we'd like to give you an opportunity to see some of the best stories he collected a decade ago.

Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo (St. Martin's Press, 1979) features 12 stories by the following authors: Harlan Ellison, Brian Aldiss, Alan Dean Foster, Connie Willis, John Kessel, Kevin O'Donnell Jr., D.C. Poyer, M. Lucie Chin, Joe L. Hensley & Gene DeWeese, John A. Taylor, Gregor Hartmann, and Eugene Potter.

For a limited time, while copies last, you can purchase a first-edition hardcover copy of *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo* for \$10, plus \$1 postage and handling. If you would like your copy autographed by the editor, please indicate how you would like the note to read.

To order, send \$11 for each copy to: *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, Book Dept., P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.



A Speaking Likeness

By Bonita Kale

Art by J. Wallace Jones

By her thirty-fifth birthday, Melissa had almost despaired. What she wanted — yearned for, panted after — was a protege. Her thoughts by day and her dreams by night were filled with an unknown young person, intelligent, enthusiastic, and diligent, who would learn her methods and carry on her work when she was gone.

She scanned the "positions wanted, off-planet" lists and sent enticing letters to youngsters with interesting bios. She studied each new group of assistants minutely, but with fading hope, unwilling to admit that what she required did not exist.

Then she thought of growing her own. It seemed an inspiration.

She discarded the possibility of normal fertilization almost as soon as it occurred to her. Glancing around the compound at the dozen or so humans there, the only humans on the planet, she shuddered. Kul research, poorly paid and unfashionable, attracted few top minds. Her staff generally consisted of has-beens, misfits, and an occasional student out for adventure and disappointed. To mingle her genes with theirs was unthinkable. Artificial insemination — but that involved totally unknown genes, possibly worse ones. No, cloning was the only way; it felt *right* for her to bear not a mongrel but a second self. Briefly she considered returning to Earth for the procedure. No. She would manage without leaving the blue-green forests and pink-flowered croplands of what she thought of as home, what the Kul called Theder, which translated as "Down," and what was called in the unimaginative language of the University of Bombay's Standard Catalog, StC2056.

Her studies of personnel lists became even more intense, but among the few people available for Kul studies, she found none with the medical expertise she sought. She was approaching forty when she settled for an old man whose principal qualification was his extensive experience with laboratory animals. For him to implant in her the tiny embryo, grown in equipment not rated for sentient-being cloning, broke more laws than Melissa cared to count, but he was at the end of the line here: if Melissa rated him poorly, he might spend the rest of his life on Earth. She knew an otherworld junkie when she saw one; she used him for what he was worth and when he left, she gave him a recommendation at least three grades above what he deserved.

Quashing thoughts of the prohibitively expensive artificial wombs, Melissa set herself to endure a nat-

ural pregnancy. She ignored the looks of her assistants as her belly began to bulge. Before the clone was born the entire staff had rotated; any questions the new people had, they kept to themselves. Melissa lived through the vomiting and the nights that seemed by morning to have been spent entirely in the head. She coddled her back, did her reports with her feet up, and in the usual time, with the usual surprising amount of pain, decanted a healthy duplicate of herself.

"What are you going to call her?" asked a student who, failing adventure, was making do with midwifery. She wrapped the baby tenderly in the gray sheeting, cheaply made from local flora, that served all purposes of paper and cloth in the camp. Then she bent down and nuzzled the child — like an animal, Melissa thought.

Melissa hadn't considered a name for her heir; offhand, she could think of only one. "Melissa, I suppose."

The student looked startled, then smoothed out her features. "Little Lissy," she crooned. "Here's your mommy, Lissy dear." Melissa was tired and in no wise ready to have a baby thrust into bed with her, but the student gave her no time for objections. "My sister has three," she explained briskly, and somehow had Melissa's breast at the baby's cheek. The baby mouth opened as the fuzzy head oscillated rapidly, homing in on the food supply. The student seized, stretched — "Ow!" protested Melissa — and rolled the nipple, until a drop of yellow fluid stood on the end of it. The baby did the rest. As Lissy suckled, utter peace flowed over Melissa — quiet that drowned the noises of the camp, calm that washed away anxiety. By the time Lissy had drained one breast and started greedily on the other, Melissa was the victim of a deep and passionate attachment for which nothing in her past life had prepared her.

At an astonishingly early age Lissy was of significant help in studying the Kul. Keeping her in camp was impossible; she ran free and grew up speaking the local Kul dialect like a mother tongue. With her help, Melissa's Kul vocabulary and grammar grew by leaps. Lissy was adept at observing the Kul in their usual haunts; the cautious approach Melissa and her assistants had practiced was unnecessary for a child regarded apparently as a friend or mascot by the Kul.

Melissa took Lissy's precocity and intelligence for granted; they were her own, and she'd never underrated her own abilities. But the child's beauty amazed



her with the same pure amazement she felt at the delicate, pastel-colored carnivorous flowers that flourished on Down. Melissa had never thought of herself as beautiful; the loveliness of Lissy's sunshine hair, wide blue eyes, and firmly set chin gave her a new look at herself.

It was Lissy who achieved one of Melissa's two long-time ambitions. In her years on Down, she had never succeeded in enticing the Kul into one of the human cabins, no matter how many invitations she called into the trees, how many doors she left open, how many intriguing objects she left on the sills. Nor had she ever entered one of the tightly woven pear-shaped basket-huts that the Kul hung in trees for sleeping. By the age of five Lissy, an active and fearless climber, was unmistakably welcome in the huts, while Melissa, who would have sacrificed at least a finger for the privilege, was ignored. She made the best of it with patient questions, and encouraged Lissy to carry a recorder.

The staff dwindled over the years. The adventurous student contingent dropped out, and what remained were mostly the slow, the old, and the ineffectual. The trouble was that Kul were both too like and too unlike humans. Too like, in that there was nothing startling about their metabolism, nothing so strange as to be fascinating for its own sake. Too unlike, in that they were not one of those humanoid races that puzzled and captivated xenobiologists seeking the Holy Grail of a General Theory of Evolution.

The Kul were merely fairly ordinary gamma-three mammals, with the broad forehead, binocular vision and prominent muzzle of their class. Their limbs were slender, their muscles efficient, their bodies and faces covered with fur in various shades of gray or brown. When they were first discovered, their six limbs caused a small sensation, but it was soon realized that the whorls of fur on their chests were the remains of infantile milk hands, and the scientific community lost interest. Eight-limbed gamma-threes were common enough. The Kul didn't seem to miss the atrophied limbs; their two arms and four legs served all their purposes.

To Melissa, they were a passion, but to the mainstream of sapientology, they were merely one more species waiting its turn in fashion.

Lissy grew up taking everything on Down for granted — the carnivorous plants and strong, tough herbivorous animals, the clustering and spreading of the four tiny moons, the games of the Kul and the fact that she couldn't smell their approach, but they could smell hers. Down was home; Kul were her playmates; Melissa was her parent.

The other humans, who obeyed Mother and grumbled among themselves, were useful only for what they knew about Earth. At five, she pumped them for stories; at seven, she ignored them and rifled their luggage for chips, reading and watching all she could find. Her private image of Earth became a jumble of cities, palaces, deserts, and oceans — all equally mythical, multicolored, and full of humans, with none of the dullness of Down.

Melissa disciplined her clone as she did herself, and Lissy, entering her teens, was of more use than

anyone else in the compound — of more use, Melissa sometimes thought, than her mother. But was the heart more useful than the brain, or the leg than the arm? Certainly, though, Lissy bore more and more of the work as the staff size decreased. She still climbed to the huts, staying sometimes in the rainy season several days. Her reports were compact, organized, and minutely detailed. Working from Lissy's information, Melissa was finally able to prepare accurate genealogies of the families in the area, all of which were part of one widespread tribal group, the Rath. She learned to recognize many of the Kul, although never with Lissy's quick certainty. Lissy couldn't or wouldn't understand how Melissa confused Leke with Lamis, although they were full brothers; or Et'fal with Donme; or Solat, great-nephew of old Rath himself, with anyone at all. Melissa studied her files doggedly, until she could identify a computer-generated image in any position of any Kul known to her, but in the field she never managed to feel as sure as Lissy sounded.

Together they observed the rites of living and dying which are among the basic determinants of sapience. They saw Kul in the fields stop work to hear a song from the trees: "Appears (a) person — (it is) up; (it is) up; (it is) up!" This was the signal for celebration; a live birth was a matter for rejoicing. If the song was "down," a stillbirth, a swift funeral interrupted work only briefly. Stillbirths were left in the woods, where the undomesticated plants made short work of them, unless Melissa salvaged the small body for anatomical study.

Several times, they saw adult funerals, accompanied by the chant, "Down (is) (Name). Fatter (is) Down." And in the soil of Down, in the fallow fields, the Kul buried their dead, and fattened their world.

The first difficulty Lissy made for Melissa's work was about a ceremony, one unique in Melissa's experience. Lissy had been gone for three days, during which time the woods and fields had resounded with the screams, chatters, and high coughing noise that signified celebration. All sound ceased abruptly at noon of the third day, and silence continued through the night. At dawn, Melissa, scanning the trees eagerly with a viewer, saw Lissy and a crowd of Kul back carefully out of a hut and onto the surrounding branches. There was rapid speech, in which Lissy took no part, and five Kul returned into the hut. A few of those left outside seemed to prod Lissy. Then one of the favored five stuck his head out and spoke briefly, and Lissy dove into the hut. Silence was complete for a few minutes; then a song — much like the birth and the death songs — came from inside, sung by one voice. It was repeated by each of the others in turn, and when Lissy's pure soprano rose Melissa was moved almost to tears as she tried to record and translate at once. "(I am) present," Lissy sang. "(I) bear witness; (I) see truth; (I) see truth."

This went on until Melissa lost count of the repetitions. When it stopped, two of the Kul emerged slowly, followed by a young male whose fur was smeared or painted with some dark stuff. Melissa could have kicked herself for not bringing a visual recorder, but she spoke low and hurriedly into her small audio, describing the scene as the other Kul and Lissy

emerged to form a sort of guard of honor on either side of the young male. They stood, Lissy's practiced feet balancing her easily on the wide branch, in formal solemnity, and the others in the trees around stared in silence. Melissa suddenly recognized the central figure — it was young Solat, Lissy's friend! Why hadn't she known him at once? Perhaps because she'd rarely seen him stand still, or because of the stuff smeared in his gray coat — perhaps because of some less definable difference between this solemn adult and the lively child she had known.

Then the Kul started to sing again, long and slow, but with a tone Melissa wouldn't have recognized, so alien was its expression, if Lissy hadn't been singing with them. The breathless triumph in her voice was the key that opened the song to Melissa, and she silently praised her second self. But the song held a mystery in its few words. "(We) show (you) Rath. (Here is) Rath. (Here is) Rath. (Here is) Rath."

Melissa stared hard at Solat, wondering if fatigue had affected her vision. But no — Rath, the tribal head, was *old*. She hadn't seen him often, but there was no danger of confusing him with this strong, straight young Kul, barely full grown.

The singers took up the words individually, "(I) show (you) Rath. (Here is) Rath. (Here is) Rath." Back and forth the song went, while Melissa had to change position, and empty her bladder, and put a new chip in her recorder. Finally, as if they could stand it no longer, the Kul in the trees broke into their own song, drowning the leaders. "(We) see Rath. (We) know Rath. (Here is) Rath."

When the day was over, a night began of unprecedented revelry. The noise penetrated the human cabins, and Melissa, revising her rough report while Lissy devoured supper, resigned herself willingly to sleeplessness. She and Lissy would spend the night correlating their notes. But Lissy was in no mood for questions. Exhaustion softened her voice, but her refusal was final. "Mother, I *must* have some sleep."

"With this noise, we can't sleep anyway, Lissy. And how important is sleep compared to this — this *thing* that just happened?"

Lissy didn't argue; she merely lay down. "I need to rest; the funeral is tomorrow."

"Funeral? Whose funeral?" Melissa shook Lissy by the arm as she herself hated to be shaken, and Lissy flung her off angrily.

"Solat's," she said, and pulling the blanket over her ears, was instantly asleep.

*** **

Minor as their quarrel was, it left a bad taste in Melissa's mouth. That and the noise kept her awake all night. "Go to sleep, Mother," Lissy said impatiently in the morning, "if you're so exhausted. I have to be there; you don't."

"Two observers are better than one, Lissy. You're good, but you're not omniscient."

"Observers!" And Lissy wouldn't say a word after that — not to explain, not to discuss yesterday's ceremonies. She left the cabin without a glance at her mother, and was in the trees before Melissa had found an observation spot. This time Melissa was prepared for both visual and aural recording; and naturally,

this time was the most ordinary of occasions, a funeral like many she'd seen before, the body in a woven basket like a pod, and the usual mourners. More elaborate than some, perhaps. The songs were the usual ones, and some of the attendants were surely of Solat's family. Others she had to wait to identify — back at the camp, she compared them with the identitree. She was unsurprised to find that they were of the immediate family of Rath. That Rath came into it somehow, she knew, though his name had not been mentioned. The only name mentioned had been that applied to the corpse — "Down (is) Solat," they had sung, and placed the basket under the field to fatten Down.

Melissa's confusion fed her anger at her clone. Here was a ceremony apparently involving sapient sacrifice on a planet that had shown no sign of such custom in the years she had been here. The crops were ample, the weather fine, there had been no illness that she knew of. Other years had seen famine, drought, fire, and one epidemic of spontaneous abortions, but never had any gods called for sacrificial propitiation. She puzzled alone, for Lissy didn't return that night or the next.

When she did, she was not the same child. Lissy stood in the doorway of their cabin and stared as if she'd never seen it before. Two beds, blanketed in the same gray paper/cloth that made her clothes and her mother's. Shelves of recording equipment; ranks of tiny drawers, full of memory chips — books, journals, their own reports. Keyboards, discarded clothes in the recycle basket, a table with the dishes from Melissa's last meal and a gray printout of a late article on the psychology of some currently fashionable alien. Melissa's eyes followed Lissy's around the room. Even in her bewilderment, she noted Lissy's beauty with pride. How tall she was — surely she must be almost her full height now — how straight was her stance, how fine her profile. But when their eyes met, Melissa was shocked at the confused exhaustion she saw. Involuntarily, she took a step forward, as Lissy dropped into a sitting position on the nearer bed, her elbows on her knees.

"Mother, let's go away."

Melissa blinked. "Away?" she repeated stupidly.

"Yes. Let's go — let's go to Earth."

Melissa closed her eyes and took two breaths. Then she stepped around the table to sit next to Lissy on the bed. Her hand went to Lissy's arm, but a minute stiffening warned her off, and she clasped her hands in her lap. "We can't go to Earth," she said. "Our work is here. There's nothing on Earth for us."

"Nothing?" Lissy asked faintly, staring at the floor. "On that whole huge planet, teeming with humans? Nothing?"

"Nothing for us. This is our place, Lissy! Here, we have work no one else can do; a chance to make a real contribution. No one else can claim precedence; what's discovered here is mine."

"Ours."

"Same thing. Oh, Lissy, if we can't be happy here, we can't be happy anywhere! I know us; I know Down is the place we're meant to be." With loving arms, she drew Lissy toward her, but Lissy shivered and stood

up, throwing her off with unaccustomed violence.

"Then let *me* go to Earth. Alone. You and the work could do without me for six months, couldn't you? Mother," she said, bending down to take Melissa's hands, and raising her so they stood eye-to-eye, "I need to leave Down. Please. Let me go for a while."

Melissa stared into her own blue eyes under her own pale eyebrows. She seemed to have mislaid the instinctive understanding she'd always relied on in dealing with this other self. "You wouldn't like it there," she said slowly, trying to buy time as she searched the eyes before her for a hint of how to handle this situation. "I always hated Earth. Dull, crowded — full of the ordinary."

"Not to me," Lissy said tiredly, dropping Melissa's hands. That was some sort of clue; Melissa tried to hold it, but lost it as Lissy continued. "Besides, how do you know I wouldn't like Earth? How do you know what I'd like and what I wouldn't? Billions of people live and die on Earth and a lot of them love it. Why shouldn't I be one of them?"

Here at least, Melissa was on firm ground. "You aren't. You're one of *us*. You'd hate it."

She'd never seen Lissy so angry. "You don't know that! I don't know that! How am I supposed to know what I'd like, if I never see anything but this godforsaken planet and never do anything but this god-damned Kul study? How can I even know who I am?"

Melissa's own anger rose to meet Lissy's, but she fought it down. "You're a very fine researcher in Kul sapientology, a vital part of our research team."

"I'm *not*!" Lissy screamed, taking a step back as if to make room for her voice in the cabin. "I'm not anything, yet! I don't know who I want to be, but I know one thing — I'm not you, Mother! I'm *me*!"

Melissa's patience snapped. "You're not," she said with precision. "You're *me*."

The scene that followed reminded Melissa forcibly of her own adolescence, when she had decided to forego a secondary school diploma for a three-year baccalaureate in xenosciences. It was a comforting thought — what a battle! But she'd won then, and would win now. Now she even had the upper hand: Lissy couldn't leave Down without her permission and her money. Besides — Earth! What was there on Earth? Certainly nothing to justify wasting six months in the life of the second self she'd conceived and reared for her studies on Down.

She wasn't surprised when Lissy, sobbing, climaxed the ugly row by running out into the woods. The child would stay with the Kul a few days and return suitably chastened. She hoped it hadn't been a mistake to tell Lissy what she was; but in the long run, the truth was probably best for both of them.

In fact, Lissy returned sooner than expected, creeping into camp the very next day and working all afternoon to clean up one of the unused cabins. Good — direct her energy into something useful. Melissa didn't mind if she wanted her own cabin. What was the next step? Of course. The camp was down to three assistants now; Melissa ran over them in her mind — old Gerald, who coughed and spat; Lorraine, middle-aged and lazy; and Saul Fendrich, fat, fifty, and

afraid of his own shadow. Lissy's next step was precisely predictable. Melissa hardly bothered to watch the girl go to Saul's door. She wondered idly if Saul would take much persuasion to let Lissy spend the night. Probably not; he had precious little mind of his own. In the morning, studying Lissy's face at a distance, Melissa thought it looked unhappy. She made no attempt to speak to her daughter, and showed no emotion when Lissy joined her for breakfast the next day. In a week, Lissy was bringing back her usual competent field reports. Melissa didn't press the matter of the funeral; she knew it would turn up in one of the reports, probably soon. Neither of them referred again to Lissy's origin. And Lissy never returned to her mother's cabin to sleep.

And still Lissy climbed to the Kul huts, like a remote eye for her mother. "Sometimes," Melissa said once, "I feel we're more than half Kul ourselves." Lissy stared at her without answering.

As for the Kuls visiting the human camp, Melissa was determined to have patience. Eventually they would come, but she had given up expecting it to be soon.

Therefore she hardly believed her senses when she woke one morning to see Lissy leading a half dozen Kul into the compound, single file. She blinked, scrambled for her equipment, and turned to the window again. Saul was out of his cabin looking astonished and ineffectual. Lorraine was probably still asleep; but Gerald was outside too, towel in hand, staring between coughs. The last of the little procession disappeared into Lissy's cabin. Feverishly, Melissa readied every recorder she had; she was taking no chances on skip-chips and missed moments this time. A glance out the door — they were still inside. She was ready.

As she stepped outside, she saw the procession re-appear from Lissy's cabin. Leaving! Her disappointment was sharp enough to distort her vision: Lissy, her Lissy, looked for a few seconds pale, unbalanced, and naked compared to the Kul with their tidy fur and one-two-three-four gait. But then they turned — away from the fields. They were coming toward her! Melissa had all she could do to step quietly back inside instead of running to meet them. Lissy was leading them to her cabin; she would wait in patience. As they came closer, she recognized most of them. Clen, Trip, Lieth, a couple she didn't know, and, immediately behind Lissy — Solat? Was it Solat? She would have to re-examine her data. The recorders were running. The door was open.

After a time the staff lost interest and returned to other duties. The monotonous singing from Melissa's cabin went on and on. No doubt Melissa was recording every word, breathless as she noted the positions, eye movements, and genealogy of each participant.

Gerald hung his towel to dry; he never could see why other people recycled after a single use. Lorraine brought the plant crossbreeding records up to date, without much interest; there would be more dull data to enter when Melissa was finished with the group in

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ABORIGINES

By Laurel Lucas



I am a sucker for tearjerkers, be they movies, novels or short stories. Pat Anthony gave us the gut-grabbing "What Brothers Are For" in issue No. 7, and in "Sweet Tooth at Io" in this issue, Anthony once again shows how compelling innocence can be.

She is also the author of "Blood Brothers" back in ABO No. 3.

Anthony says her literary situation is in limbo these days. Del Rey has had her novel, *Into Temptation*, for 13 months now and she's waiting to hear if they will accept it.



Patricia Anthony

"It's been so long that I've written part-two and part-three sequels," she says.

The novel is set 700 years in the future and the empire of Brazil has taken over the world. Anthony is familiar with that country, having taught English lit and gotten her masters degree from the Universidade de Santa Catarina, Brazil.

In other areas, things are looking up for her. "I finally got an agent who doesn't lose my manuscripts," she told me.

"Sweet Tooth" is illustrated by Lucy Synk, in her first appearance in ABO. Synk has a bachelor's degree in fine arts. She started out working at Hallmark, the greeting card company, but is now working full-time as a freelance fantasy artist.

T is Kansas City resident travels
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to conventions and art shows to exhibit her work and recently went to World Con in Brighton, England. While she was there she spent two weeks touring Wales and Scotland.



Lucy Synk

I liked her list of favorite artists: Maxfield Parrish, Rembrandt, Dawn Wilson and Michael Whelan.

"The Darkness Beyond" is a good-and-creepy thriller. Both the plot and the characters themselves could be called science fiction/horror hybrids.

It's written by ABO newcomer Jamil Nasir, a Maryland lawyer who is married to Victoria Grace Nasir, an aspiring actress.

"Darkness" is Nasir's first professional sale, but he has written "tons" of other stories.



Jamil Nasir

May/June 1988

When asked to name one interesting thing he has done lately, Nasir wrote "I can't remember the last time I did anything interesting. Neither can my wife."

But in March, he told us that his story "The Nomalers" had just won first prize in the first quarter 1988 Writers of the Future contest.

"I'm very happy about it, and also it is at least one interesting thing you can put in my bio," he wrote.

"The Darkness Beyond" is illustrated by Cortney Skinner.

Skinner's record for appearing in every ABO issue since the beginning was broken in issue No. 9, but to make up for that, he is illustrating two stories in this issue.

Due to a layout error, details of Skinner's latest endeavor came out garbled in my column in issue No. 8, so let me fill you in again.

Skinner has been commissioned by the Avenue Victor Hugo bookstore



Cortney Skinner

on Newbury Street in Boston to create an unusual display window.

In a space the size of a phone booth, Skinner will try to create the illusion that passersby are peering into a turn-of-the-century bookstore.

Skinner says the project is a combination painting/sculpture/trompe-l'oeil. Like a diorama in a museum, solid objects will blend into the painted background.

Skinner is well-suited for the project because he is not only an artist,

he is an avid student of history.

The other story Skinner illustrates in this issue is Howard V. Hendrix's "The Last Impression of Linda Vista."



Howard V. Hendrix

It's a short tale of an artist who works in a rather unwieldy medium—atom bombs.

Hendrix likes the doomsday theme. His other *ABO* story was "Doctor Doom Conducting" in issue No. 6, and as an English lit Ph.D. he has written some criticism of apocalyptic texts.

Hendrix tells me he just received a professorship at Central Methodist College in Missouri, and will be moving from his California home with wife Laurel in June.

Hendrix's recent experience with an editor at Bantam Books demonstrates that it can be worthwhile to appear in this column.

He had written a short story called "The Farm System" which editor Shawna McCarthy had accepted for Bantam's upcoming *Full Spectrum* anthology.

At about the same time, McCarthy was perusing *ABO* and read in this column that Hendrix was trying to sell his first novel. She asked him to send her a copy of it.



Robert A. Metzger

She didn't end up buying it, unfortunately. But that doesn't diminish Hendrix's pride in his "great, inaccessible art novel."

"Third Chance" is actually Robert Metzger's fourth story for *ABO*. Metzger is beginning to attract a fan following, and even some imitators, according to our editor, Charlie Ryan, who reads all the manuscripts aspiring authors send us.

Metzger wrote "An Unfiltered Man" in issue No. 6, "True Magic" in issue No. 7 and "Eve and the Beast" in issue No. 8.

Metzger tells us that the people at the Hughes Research Labs where he works as a "mad scientist" got a big kick out of "Eve and the Beast."

"I couldn't even keep count of the number of people who stopped me in the hallway wanting to tell me their own personal horror stories experienced in their quests for Ph.D.s," he says.

The graduate student character in "Eve" at one point fantasizes about



Larry Blamire

doing in his thesis advisor with a tire iron.

Metzger says after he wrote the story he found a surprise on his desk at work one morning. "It was a tire iron," he says, "with a note attached that read: Bob Metzger's Persuader."

This latest Metzger creation includes the characters of Marilyn Monroe, Abraham Lincoln and a microwave oven, just for starters.

Larry Blamire, whose work graces our cover this issue, illustrated Metzger's story, as always.

Blamire enjoys his Metzger assignments. "His stuff is always humorous and surrealistic. I've always enjoyed surrealism. It's part of the appeal of SF, that side of it, so Metzger's stories are really perfect."

For the cover art, Blamire says he decided to feature the Reverend Walker, because he was intrigued by

the description of his ugly scar and sinister demeanor.

Hold on to your seats, folks. Blamire is already working on Metzger's fifth story for an upcoming



Bonita Kale

issue. All I will tell you is that it features Elvis Presley imitators.

Blamire, who is also an actor and playwright, has just finished his eighth and is now working on his ninth play.

The former, called "The Three-Eyed Man" depicts a couple's "seedy carnival encounter at a freak show," he says.

The other work is being written for the Gloucester Stage Company, and it's called "Chroma Line."

Blamire says it's about working-class Boston and has some "raunchy and nasty" things in it.

Blamire draws from his past experience as a worker in a wallpaper warehouse in South Boston.

Sometimes in fiction it is just as much fun to root against the protagonist as it is to root for him or her.

I took an immediate dislike to the main character in Bonita Kale's story "A Speaking Likeness," which made the story all the more enjoyable.

Kale has the distinction of having her bio appear in this magazine one more time than her work has appeared. Our gooi.

Kale wrote the poem "From a New World" in issue No. 9.

"A Speaking Likeness" is her first professional short story sale, if you don't count the one she wrote for her Sunday school's paper recently.

Kale lives with her banker husband William F. Kale and three children in Ohio.

J. Wallace Jones illustrates "A Speaking Likeness." This is his first professional SF assignment.

Jones works as a planetarium artist ("like *ABO* artist Pat Morrissey") at the Bays Mountain Planetarium in Kingsport, Tennessee.

He is presently working on his next *ABO* assignment, which is another story by Patricia Anthony,

(Continued to page 59)

The Darkness Beyond

By Jamil Nasir

Art by Courtney Skinner

I

Sunday afternoon, store windows were dark. Stripped of its crowds, downtown looked dirty, worn-out, empty. The air was still, and thunder muttered uneasily between the buildings. Butler Maclaine, driven from his apartment by the emptiness of TV, walked through a wasteland. When it started to rain he sheltered under the marquee of a rundown movie theater.

He stood for awhile watching the rain, breathing the coolness of it. Then he bought a ticket and went in for the last twenty minutes of the Kung Fu picture that was playing. When it was over he stayed in his seat to watch the handful of patrons leave. The last to come up the aisle was a woman. She was almost past him when he realized he knew her.

He followed her into the foyer. She had her hand on the exit door.

"Miss," he said.

She turned.

"Jean," he said. "You're Jean Bellows." His heart was pounding.

"No," she said, and pushed the door open.

He followed her onto the sidewalk.

"Miss," he called after her.

She ignored him. She got into a long black car waiting at the curb. The car pulled away, got lost in the rain.

II

Back at his apartment he got rid of his wet clothes, towed his hair, hunted in a closet for a box of old photographs. He shuffled through the box until he found one of a girl in sweat pants and an undershirt, sitting on a desk covered with papers. She looked just the way Butler remembered her, a little younger than the woman at the movie theater. He studied the photograph for a long time, listening to the rain outside his window.

III

Two weeks later, leaving work through a street filled with deep blue evening air, he saw her again. At a corner was a restaurant with windows that showed candlelight shining on tablecloths and dinnerware. She sat at a table with a man.

Butler didn't have a reservation, so they made him wait, then gave him a tiny table behind a pillar. He held his menu unopened, staring at the woman. The man with her had graying hair, sat very straight, and talked in a hard, military baritone. Butler couldn't catch the words.

He asked the waiter: "Who's the woman in the black dress?"

"I'm sorry, sir. Even if I knew—"

"Does she come here a lot?"

"She and the gentleman."

Butler ordered coffee. He was drinking it when the gray-haired man got up, took the woman's hand briefly, and left. The woman sat poking at some bright-colored dessert with a long spoon. Butler went to her table.

"Excuse me," he said, and sat down. She looked at him wide-eyed, spoon poised in the dessert.

"I spoke to you in a movie house a few weeks ago," he said. "I don't know if you remember."

When she didn't answer, he went on: "I'm new in town, and I didn't think I knew anyone here. But you look exactly like — an old friend of mine. Down to the smallest detail. Her name was Jean Bellows."

"Go away," said the woman.

"Even your voice sounds like hers."

"I'm not your friend," said the woman. "Go away."

He didn't move. He looked into her face, her eyes. She looked steadily back, held a hand up in the air. A man in a tuxedo was at the table in seconds, leaning over her attentively.

She talked without taking her eyes off Butler. "This gentleman has lost his table."

The man turned his attentiveness on Butler. "Can I help you in some way, sir?"

"No." He stood up, nodded to the woman, left the restaurant. He didn't pay for his coffee.

IV

Across the street from the restaurant was a bar. Butler sat at a table under its blue neon sign, pondering and watching the restaurant. After half an hour the woman came out and walked quickly down the street. He followed.

He didn't know the neighborhoods she led him through. The streets were narrow and dark, except where some coffee house or bar had sidewalk tables. Her dark hair and coat blended with the shadows. She turned onto a climbing street with the moon floating at the end of it. Halfway up the block she turned again, and was gone. Butler walked slowly along an alley that dead-ended at a high wooden fence. There were back doors that looked rotted shut, but when he went closer, one was ajar.

He had to stoop under a fire escape ladder to push



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it open. It creaked. He stood still and listened, but there was no sound, no movement in the darkness beyond. He went in. Faint streetlight glow fell on trash by his feet. The air was stuffy, sour. He got a cigarette lighter out of his pocket; the wavering flame showed a brick-walled room piled with garbage. It looked like a place where bums slept, smelled like an animal's lair. Another doorway led into more darkness. Butler thought he heard a faint sound in there.

He tried to walk silently, but trash rustled under his feet. He stuck his head and lighter through the next doorway. It was a bigger room, and the light made shadows of the corners. There was a kind of path through the garbage leading to a third doorway. The lighter burned his thumb, and he let it go out.

It was utterly dark. He held his breath. Not far away someone was walking.

Butler cursed silently, waved the lighter in the air to cool it. He took a few steps, stumbled over something, stopped. Then he lit the lighter and tiptoed to the next door.

The inner room was very big; he couldn't see walls or ceiling. There was trash, rusted metal, rotted wood piled in all directions. The path went straight ahead into darkness. He followed it, his footsteps echoing. When he saw the woman he almost dropped the lighter.

She was leaning against a wall at the end of the path, her eyes flickering in the flame. She didn't move as he got closer. When he was five feet away, she said: "What do you want?"

Her voice echoed.

He said: "Jean."

"No."

"Who are you?"

"All you need to know, little man, is to stop following me. I don't like it, and I could hurt you."

Butler's lighter burned his thumb again, and he let it go out.

"Why did you lead me in here? Why didn't you talk to me on the street?"

"I like it in here. And there are — people — who wouldn't like it if they saw us talking."

"Who?"

"All you have to know is to stop following me, stay away from me, forget you ever saw me. Understand?"

"No."

A wad of garbage flew into his face.

"I'm trying to do you a favor, asshole," she snarled. "But it's OK with me if you want to die."

She pushed past him in the dark. He lit the lighter and she spun around, knocking it out of his hand.

Following the sound of her steps, he picked his way slowly through the trash.

Dim streetlight seemed bright when he reached the outer door. The alley was empty and she wasn't in sight when he got to the corner. A taxi was coming down the street. He caught it.

"Drive around," he told the cabby.

They drove in widening circles, the cabby telling him about another guy he had picked up looking for his girlfriend. It was ten minutes before Butler saw her hurrying along the street. He cut the driver's story off

with a bill, got out at the end of the block, stood in a doorway waiting for her. Wind had come up, bringing the smell of rain. A sheet of newspaper blew past, but the woman was taking her time. Butler looked around the corner.

A black car was double-parked halfway down the block, and she was fighting two men trying to drag her into it.

Butler ran. By the time he got to where the car had been, it was turning the corner, the woman inside. He ran. The car was waiting for a light that turned green as he got close. His cab was behind it. He caught the cab in time to bang on the rear fender.

V

The black car wasn't in a hurry. It coasted into a deluxe part of town, stopped in front of gilt and glass doors with a canopy and red carpet. A doorman helped the woman out. The gray-haired man got out behind her and she took his arm. Doormen fussed them inside. Other people were arriving; none of them seemed afflicted by poverty. Butler sauntered into a lobby you would need to pack a lunch to walk across. Music came from somewhere.

A tuxedoed man took a look at Butler's clothes and said: "Sorry, sir. Private club."

"Know the woman that came in here ahead of me? Dark eyes, curly hair, pretty? With an older guy?"

"I'm sorry, I can't help you, sir."

Rain pattered on the sidewalk, rattled the dry leaves of trees. At the end of an alley was an oil-stained concrete loading bay, standing open. Butler went through a storage room, down bare hallways painted industrial green. Doors led into a dark place with flashing lights, smoke, loud music. Butler pushed through the crowd, looking for the woman. He jostled someone; it was the gray-haired man. Up close he had a tanned, polite, arrogant face; a rich man's face.

The woman was dancing, sweat glistening on her shoulders and arms. She paid no attention to the athletic blond man opposite her, or to anything else. When the music stopped she turned away from the blond man without a word. She took two steps toward Butler before she saw him.

Her face got a strange look. She pushed past people to the group the gray-haired man was dominating, said something in his ear. He turned and looked at Butler, and smiled. Butler didn't like the smile. He smiled back.

The man's eyes were disturbing. The polite sneer didn't change, but there was a savageness, a hatred. Butler was suddenly afraid. The man smiled again, and Butler saw this time that his teeth were crooked, rotten, bloody. There was another change too. The crowded dance hall was gone; the flickering light came from a guttering candle that showed the walls of a tiny, filthy room. And in front of him was not a tall man in a gray suit, but a hag who reached for him with clawed hands.

He heard a scream, felt a violent concussion. There was confusion, legs moving, faces staring as he pushed himself off the floor, untangled himself from the woman he had knocked down. He had enough presence of mind to apologize. The woman's

boyfriend, eyes dilated with some drug, pushed forward, snarling. Butler was bigger; there was laughter from the crowd. People started dancing again. The tuxedoed man who had stopped Butler in the lobby was pushing through the crowd, a nervous waiter at his side.

VI

Butler got a taxi home. Fog had seeped into the streets, and there were halos around the lights. The sidewalk in front of his building was unfamiliar, tunnel-like. He rode the elevator to his floor, still feeling numb and shaken.

When he turned on his living-room lamp, the woman was sitting on the couch. She wore a raincoat and held a gun. She said: "I told you to stay away from me."

Her eyes were shaded from the yellowish light of the lamp. The gun pointed at a spot above Butler's navel. He didn't move or say anything.

"Aren't you a little bit scared?" she sneered. Suddenly the gun jumped at him. There was a bang like a door slamming and hot, acrid smoke brushed his face. He knocked over a chair trying to get somewhere else, heard the bullet break something behind him.

"Why have you been following me?" The gun was like a steel question mark in her hand.

"You're Jean Bellows."

"I am not Jean Bellows, or whatever you say her name is."

Butler tried to catch his breath. "You look like Jean Bellows. You have Jean Bellows's voice. You're Jean Bellows."

She was leaning back on the couch now. She shook a lock of hair out of her eyes. Fog made a faint haze in the yellow lamplight.

"This Jean Bellows," she said. "What did she look like?"

"Like you."

"You have pictures?"

"Yes."

"Show me."

"Why?"

The gun moved a little, suggesting that he get the pictures. He went to the closet, came toward her with the box.

"I'm going to sit next to you. I hope that doesn't make you gun nervous."

He sat on the couch, the box between them. She held the gun within easy reach of his vital organs, took the photographs he handed her with her left hand.

"This is a couple of days before Christmas, at school. You just finished your last exam. Remember?"

"No."

"You're standing on the library steps."

"Where did she get that cheap coat?"

"We were students. We were on financial aid. You got it at the Salvation Army. Remember? On Catherine Street, across from the food co-ops."

"No."

"This is you having a snowball fight with Larry Fagerstrom and some other people. Remember Larry? He was always trying to pick you up."

"He's ugly."

"That's not a good picture of him. See how you manage to look like Rita Hayworth even with snow all over your face?" He watched her study the photograph. "You really don't remember these, do you?" he asked suddenly.

She shook her head.

He pulled the photograph out of her hand, substituted a new one.

"This is you and me outside the Del Rio. That night — I think it was that night — we got drunk and had a fight."

"Did we fight a lot?"

"Yes. This is you sitting on your desk after studying four days for a final."

The gun in her hand was relaxing; she was almost holding it on her lap instead of pointing it. Butler balled his fist and hit her on the side of the head, hard. She went over backward, the gun thumping on the carpet, photographs scattering. He grabbed her wrists and yanked her upright. Her body was slack. Her eyes fluttered open and slowly focused. She smiled faintly, dizzily.

"Kiss me," she said.

VII

He woke up in bed with the woman moaning beside him. Wind was blowing in the trees outside, and thunder muttered heavily. She was covered with sweat, trembling in her sleep. She moaned again, then arched her back and cried out in fear or pain. Butler put his hands on her shoulders. Her body was hot, slick with sweat, tensed hard. He shook her.

With a scream she leapt on him, tearing at his throat. She was amazingly strong; in the second before she woke she had him on his back, straddling him. Then her hands relaxed and she stared. Sweat ran down her face.

"You," she said huskily, and rolled off. He sat up, feeling the place where her hands had been. Thunder sounded, closer now, and tree branches swept in front of the streetlight.

"You were having a nightmare," said Butler.

She nodded miserably. She huddled under the blankets, shivering as if with fever.

"Are you all right?"

She didn't say anything, just stared at him out of huge dark eyes. He touched the side of her face. It was wet and hot.

"You turning into a werewolf or something?" he asked. "What's the matter?"

She made an effort at a smile. "Allergic reaction," she said with difficulty.

"To what?"

"Forbidden blood."

Suddenly she sat up. Rain had begun to patter against the window. She threw her covers off, eyes wild.

"Open," she rasped.

He opened the window, held her when she tried to climb out. Rain drenched them. It seemed to calm her: after awhile she crawled back into bed and fell asleep. Butler fell asleep too. When he woke, a little before dawn, she was gone.

She came to him a few more times, always at

night, always without warning. He would find her in his bed, in the shower, in his armchair. She didn't talk much. She was lustful and violent in bed, and afterwards she would lie dully, staring at nothing. She never told him how she got in. She never told him why she always left an hour before dawn.

One night he said: "Have dinner with me tomorrow."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because we would be seen."

"Seen by who?"

"Some people."

"Who?"

She didn't answer.

"I'll meet you outside your restaurant," he said.

"Tomorrow. When you pull up in that big limo."

She took something from her handbag, grabbed a handful of his hair and pushed the thing against his throat. It was her gun.

"Listen," she said. "If you ever speak to me or get near me in public, I'll never come here again. I'll have you crippled. I have — friends — who would kill you without batting an eye." She took the gun away, put it back in her bag. "If you're good, maybe we can see each other a few more times."

"I don't want to see you anymore," he said angrily.

But he waited as anxiously as ever for her to come back.

For awhile she seemed a little less unhappy. She was fascinated by his photographs, especially the ones that contained her. She made him tell the story that went with each one over and over, asking questions about every detail. When they had gone through all the photographs, they would make love.

One night when she was putting on her clothes, she said: "I can't come anymore."

Butler stared at her back. "Why not?"

She didn't answer.

He twisted her roughly around to face him. She looked dully into his eyes.

"Why not?"

"They're suspicious. They watch me. I can't come anymore."

"I'll come to where you are."

She shook her head and started dressing again. When she was done she faced him.

"Goodbye," she said.

VIII

The next day was cold, with an occasional beam of weak sunlight. Butler called his office with some excuse, then took a walk, thinking, hands in the pockets of his overcoat. He was in a run-down neighborhood of cracked sidewalks and vacant industrial buildings when there was someone at his side. Her.

"I have to talk to you," she said. She led him to a deserted street lined with warehouses. They stood close to a graffiti-covered wall, she looking up and down the street.

"They know—" she said.

Tires squealed at the corner and Butler turned in time to see a car careen past, a man leaning out the window and pointing something at them. The thing

made noise and something hit Jean. Then the car was squealing out of sight and she was lying on the sidewalk, gasping. There were two dark spots on the front of her coat. Butler was kneeling over her. She was clutching his hands, rolling her eyes as if she couldn't see. Her face was twisted with pain.

"Butler?" she cried out clearly, as if looking for him in the dark.

Yes, he heard himself say.

She opened her mouth again, but only blood came out.

People were shouting and running, and leaning over him, and somebody said they would get the police, and then there was a flashing red light, and by that time she was still and not squeezing his hands anymore, and staring at the sky with her eyes wide open, as if she had never seen a sky before. The policemen made him get out of her and walked him away, took his wallet and put him in the back seat of a car. There was a crowd, and an ambulance, and the ambulance men carried away something under a sheet. More police came, and one of them stuck his head in the window of Butler's car, but Butler couldn't hear what he said.

They drove Butler downtown, put him in a little room, and took turns asking him questions. He told them a simple story that was almost all true: he had known the dead woman at school by the name of Jean Alexandra Bellows, had lost touch with her when they graduated, met her here a few months ago; she wouldn't tell him anything about herself; he had slept with her a few times; today she met him on the street. He didn't tell them about her "friends," or her fear that she was being watched; it seemed too complicated. The policemen didn't like his story. They were making him tell it for the tenth time when a man stuck his head in the door and said: "She's ready, Lieutenant."

"OK," said the Lieutenant. "We want you to identify her before she gets too cold, Mr. MacLaine. You up to it?"

He nodded.

They went down metal stairs to a basement hall, into a concrete room with shaded bulbs hanging from a low ceiling. A man pulled a long drawer out of a wall full of drawers. Refrigerated air came from the drawer with a faint sanitary smell. Jean lay in the drawer with a sheet pulled up to her shoulders. Butler felt as cold and faraway as she looked. He kept his hands in his pockets.

"This the Jean Alexandra Bellows you told us about?" asked the Lieutenant.

He nodded, not taking his eyes off her.

"OK," said the Lieutenant. "Back upstairs."

The man rolled the drawer shut.

They questioned him for three more hours, until he could hardly talk anymore. Finally they gave him a form to sign for his wallet, told him not to leave town, and let him go. He got a cab to his apartment.

When he switched on the light in his bedroom, she was there, wrapped in the morgue sheet, her skin chalk white, sunken eyes glittering.

He stood perfectly still. She came closer. There was dried blood on her lips and cheek. The cold smell



of antiseptic still hung around her. She touched his face. Her hand was ice-cold.

"I want to talk to you," she whispered.

He didn't say anything, didn't move.

"I'm cold," she said, plaintively, softly.

After a long while he said: "Jean?"

She shook her head.

"Are you alive?"

"I am alive. This body is dead."

After a long while she said: "I'm cold, Butler."

He said: "Who are you?"

"I took this body from your old lover last year. It was young and beautiful and mine was old. I have lived with my sisters for hundreds of years, preying on the bodies of — normal people."

He could only stare.

"I saw her on the street one day, and I wanted her. I introduced myself, pretending to think she was someone else. We became friends. I made myself fascinating to her: an old woman who knew intimately of impossible times and places, and hinted at even more glamorous knowledge. I threw my thoughts to her at night so that she dreamed of me.

"One day when she was visiting me I drugged her, undressed her, and cut her along the spine, bled a drop of my blood into each cut. So we pass the virus that prepares new bodies for our habitation.

"For a few days she was sick and stayed home, but then she began to think of me, to desire me: the bridge virus was attacking her brain, blood, and nerves, substituting my DNA for hers, turning her body into a shell for my personality. In a few weeks she was so obsessed with me that it was terrible pain for her to be away even for a minute — and no wonder: her brain was becoming my brain, her nerves my nerves, her blood mine. One night as she lay clutching me I effected the Exchange, flooding her willing body with my mind, displacing her.

"So this body became mine."

He was dizzy, sick. He put his face in his hands and leaned against the wall. When he could pay attention again, she was telling him a strange story.

"My sisters had me killed. A thousand years of inbreeding nurtured the mutation that made us, and it is taboo to mate with outsiders. My sisters still worship the old taboos, especially — the man who frightened you at the dance club. She became a man so that we could mate. She is eaten away with age, rotten with it, insanely jealous of anyone who comes near me.

"Living always apart and touching no one, we have developed many sensitivities — allergies, you would call them. My sisters smeared their bullets with an animal secretion that turns our blood to poison. They thought that would loose my hold on this body.

"The bullets flung me away past the limits of the place I have the skill to return from. Blackness took me, and my last thought was that I was dead. Then, suddenly, I was somewhere bright and warm.

"It seemed to be noon, and the sun shone on greenery. I looked down at my body. There was no blood or sign of hurt. 'I'm dead,' I kept telling myself, 'this is a dream.' But it didn't go away. I was in a huge garden with beds and trellises and bushes of flowers.

For a long time the only sounds were bees buzzing and the wind moving the branches of trees. Finally I heard, a long way off, a clicking. I went toward it.

"The garden was very big, but finally the clicking got closer, and I came in sight of an old man leaning over a bush, a pair of hedge-clippers in his hand. He was very tall, and wore a long, dusty coat or robe. He was so intent on the bush that he didn't notice me, even when I stood a few feet away. He studied every part of the bush with patient concentration, finally snipped off a twig, and then started to study it again. It was strange: I seemed to remember him from somewhere. I was about to speak when he turned and held his hand out to me. There was a mirror in it. In the mirror I was — horribly ugly." She shuddered. "I screamed.

"My scream seemed to tear the sunlight; darkness opened under me and I fell — into a dead, silent place piled with bones that broke under me like dry sticks. I clawed to get out, sank further and further, the bones burying me. I couldn't breathe. My screams made no sound.

"Then there was a light. I could see an opening floating high above me. The torso of the old man appeared in it, peering down. His hands reached through and scooped me out of the bones.

"I could breathe again. I was back in the garden. I lay clutching the warm dirt, sobbing. I could hear the clicking of the old man's hedge-clippers, a long way off again. And suddenly I remembered who he was. I had been with him in that garden many times. I got up to run to him, when something stopped me. A cord hung down in front of me, a silver cord that went up into the sky. I stood for a long time looking at it. Then, reluctantly, I put my hands on it and climbed. I climbed very high — I could see the old man, and around him the garden, and woods and fields and little hills. I climbed until the blue sky turned black. Finally I was in this body again, lying in a place like a tomb, freezing cold. It was a refrigerator where they keep dead bodies, in the basement of some place. I got out and came here. To ask you for something. A favor.

"I must go back soon, to him. I want you to send my sisters to me. They have forgotten him too, and their long lives are only a burden."

IX

Butler drove her to the docks. The night was misty and cold, a few stars shining fuzzily. A pier stretched into the mist. They walked out on it. There were no people. Water murmured and whispered, and the sound of a foghorn came from far off. At the end of the pier floated the moon, making a silver squiggle on the quiet swells. A little water splashed onto the walkway.

The woman dropped the sheet from around her. Her body glowed white in the moonlight. She slipped into the water and he could see her white arms stroking, swimming toward the moon. When she was almost out of sight she turned for a moment to look back; then she turned again, and in a few seconds was gone.

X

The address she had given him was on a narrow street overlooking the city, where high walls enclosed gardens and you could only see the tops of houses

among the trees. The street was quiet, empty. Four little bottles clinked in his pockets as he walked. She had made a mess of his bathroom filling them with her blood; he hoped the police didn't come by until he had a chance to clean it up.

The garden gate was unlocked. The garden had a gazebo, big flower beds, a flagstone walk. The house was stone, slate-roofed, with three stories, gables and French windows. There was no sound but birds singing.

Around the side of the house were dark basement windows. He kicked the glass out of one and lowered himself into a brick-walled room. A furnace hissed in the corner. The door of the room was ajar, and from outside it came a noise.

The noise stopped, then started again. Someone was banging at a door, rattling it. He stood still, hardly breathing, a bottle ready in his hand. The noise stopped and started, stopped and started.

He moved slowly into the passage outside the door. At one end of it stairs led upward, at the other end was darkness. He edged along the wall. A bolted wooden door was being rattled from the inside. When the rattling stopped there was a faint whining. He drew the bolt and opened the door.

An old woman in a dirty sack dress stood there. Her skin was gray and her hair was greasy and tangled. She shuffled backward.

"Don't hurt me," she whined. "I'm hungry, I'm hungry — and him, I think he's dying." She moved an arm in the direction of a filthy bed with an old man who looked like he had died weeks ago. Butler took a step into the room. The old woman cringed away, squinting her watery eyes at him.

"Don't hurt me," she whined. "I'm hungry — and him, I think he's dying."

"Who are you?" asked Butler.

At the sound of his voice the old woman stood still.

"Who are you?" asked Butler again.

She came close to him, clung to his jacket with clawed hands, stared into his face. She stank.

Suddenly she screamed, her voice rasping and cracking.

"Butler!" she screamed. "Butler, help me! Butler, it's Jean! Help me! Don't you remember? It's Jean! Butler, please!" She clung to him, tried to kiss him on the mouth. He pushed her away; she clawed at him, trying to hold him. "Butler, it's Jean! Butler, help me! They did this to me! They—" He threw her off again, backed out the door and threw the bolt. There was banging and wailing from inside, and he could hear his name. He looked at his watch. Twelve-thirty. The first one would come any minute. He ran up the stairs. He was shaking.

The door at the top of the stairs was heavy, and cut off the old woman's wailing when he shut it behind him. Beyond was a wide hallway with the front door at the far end. The floor was dark polished wood, and floor-length curtains blew out languidly from windows. A darkened sitting-room opened on his left, and carpeted stairs went up somewhere. There was a huge gold-framed mirror on the wall.

Steps sounded on the flagstones outside. A key went into the front door lock. The door opened and a

woman came in. She was tall and blonde, had slanting green eyes and high cheekbones, looked about thirty-five. She wore a white dress and a white fur jacket, carried packages and a purse. She closed the door before she saw Butler. When she saw him she became very still.

"Who are you?" she asked.

He didn't move, didn't speak.

The woman put down her things and walked toward him, warily, but without fear. Butler's hands were fumbling with the cap on a little bottle. The woman looked at his hands, stopped walking.

He threw the poison blood on her. It splattered on her face, made a stark pattern on her clothes. For a second she looked surprised. Then the blood started to hiss and smoke, like acid or red-hot metal. She clawed at herself wildly and fell.

She screamed deafeningly. The scream was not human. It shook the house, threw Butler against the wall, made the room dark. The mirror turned into flying shards of glass. There was a smell of burning. Then she lay still, panting like a sick animal.

Butler pushed himself off the floor. His hands were trembling so much he could hardly find the other bottles. But he had to; the others would come now. He stood in the corner by the basement door and got the tops off two of them. The hallway was dim, as if the sun had gone behind a cloud, and the bottles of blood fizzed and smoked.

Then two things happened at once. Something flew through the hall window three feet from him; glass shattered, wood splintered, and a man stood there, staring at the hurt woman, his back to Butler. There was a sharp explosion and the front door blew to bits. Butler splashed blood on the man at the window; he fell on his face without a sound, body twitching and writhing as if his clothes were full of small animals fighting to get out. Smoke poured off him. The one who had blasted the door was flying through the air; Butler caught a glimpse of her black hair and loose sleeves fluttering, her pale snarling face — then she had him by the throat, slamming his head into the floor with tremendous strength. He was barely able to dash the third bottle of blood against her hip. She shrieked, and her hand went away. He could feel her thrashing wildly on top of him.

There was a tremendous explosion. The wall above Butler came apart. Dust, splinters and rubble flew. Butler coughed and wiped dust out of his eyes, sat up with the black-haired woman still on top of him.

A man was standing at the top of the staircase. He was tall and straight, had gray hair, a gray suit. As Butler watched, a spark twinkled between his eyebrows. The spark flashed out and there was another terrific explosion. The floor next to Butler turned to dust and flying debris; he could see shattered supporting beams through a four-foot hole. He got his feet under him and stood up, dragging the black-haired woman so that she was a shield between him and the man. She was unconscious, moaning and trembling. He fumbled in his pocket for the last bottle, tried to hold it and unscrew the cap with the same hand.

The gray man was coming down the stairs. He

came slowly, with dignity, like the guest of honor at a dinner party. He walked around the hole he had blasted in the floor. When he was six feet away, Butler said: "Stop."

The man stopped and stood looking at Butler. His face was composed, solemn, almost sad.

He said: "Where did you get that?" He nodded at the uncapped bottle Butler held by the unconscious woman's face.

"Don't get any nearer," said Butler.

The man nodded. "Where did you get it?"

"Jean gave it to me."

"Who?"

"The woman you killed."

The man thought about that for a second. Then he nodded, his eyes far off.

"Ah, Yaxis," he said. "We underestimated you. Too bad. And this is your little toy?" He looked at Butler again. He said: "Yaxis sent you?"

Butler didn't answer.

"Where is she now?"

Butler said: "Dead."

"Yaxis dead and you here?" He fixed his eyes on Butler's. "Who are you?" he whispered.

Butler's body began to get numb. He gasped for breath. He tore his eyes away.

"Stop it!" he shouted. "Or you'll fry like your friends."

But the man was gone. In his place was Jean,

wearing a loose blue silk gown. She looked alive, beautiful.

She held out her hands to him.

"Butler," she said.

He couldn't move, couldn't talk.

"Butler, help me," she said. "Come to me. I need you! I don't want to die. I was wrong! There is something horrible in this place! Please come! Help me to be alive again!"

A hoarse sound came from Butler's throat: "No."

"Please! Before it's too late for me!"

Butler clung dizzily to the woman he was holding. He felt sick.

There was a scream, and suddenly Jean was fighting, struggling against something black and spindly. A rotting skeleton twined its arms and legs around her. Worms writhed in its black eye-holes. Maggots wriggled out of its open jaws. Jean screamed. The skeleton fixed its teeth on her face and bit, and the scream turned into a gurgle as bone crunched and blood spurted.

Butler screamed and lifted his arm to throw the blood. At that instant Jean and the skeleton were gone, and the man stood there in his gray suit, smiling faintly.

"You don't like that," he said. "That is where Yaxis has gone if she is truly dead. I showed you a true picture of her condition. You don't like truth."

More Art On Page 64

The ABO Art Gallery

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ABO #9



ABO #10

Butler breathed hard, didn't answer.

"We who have beaten that demon, why do you want to destroy us? Why don't you join us? I could teach you."

"No," said Butler.

"Never to go down under the earth to be eaten by—"

"No!" shouted Butler. "No!"

"You don't like truth," said the man. Suddenly he was gone again and Jean was there. She wore a shimmering golden robe. She put her head back so he could see the line of her throat, untied the robe and let it fall, ran her hands over her body and stretched. Then she lay on the floor and looked at Butler with sleepy eyes.

"Come," she whispered.

"You're not Jean," said Butler.

"Neither was Yaxis," murmured the woman. "The real Jean is the hag downstairs. It is this body you want. I can give it to you. Come." She arched her body and ran her hands over it.

When Butler didn't move or speak she stood up gracefully, walked closer. Her hair was long and thick and there were flowers in it.

"I could always appear to you this way," she said softly. "Live forever with me, rich and happy." Her voice got even softer. "Rest now. You're safe. Jean's here. That's right."

Suddenly Butler knew that he was falling asleep, hypnotized by her eyes. The bottle of blood dropped in his hand. The unconscious woman was sliding to the floor. With an effort he looked away from the being that now was Jean, shook himself, pulled the woman back up.

He lifted the bottle of blood. The man was in front of him again, standing straight and dignified.

"Say goodbye," said Butler hoarsely.

The man closed his eyes resignedly. "Yaxis's revenge," he said.

"Not revenge," said Butler. "She saw something beautiful there. Not skeletons and worms — something beautiful. She wants you to see it too. In spite of yourselves."

The man opened his eyes and looked at Butler.

"She told you this?"

"Yes."

"Something beautiful?"

"A garden, she said, and a place where—"

The man burst out laughing. He laughed for a long time, a strong, hearty laugh.

When he had stopped, he said to Butler: "She told you that? Something beautiful? You fool!" he snarled. "You stupid yokel! I have been to the land of Death many times, and so has Yaxis. We go there to change bodies. She knows it as well as I do." He threw up a hand as Butler raised the bottle. "Wait! Shall I tell you about the land of Death? So you'll know where you're sending me, and where you'll soon follow, you pitiful fool? I've been there! I've seen it!"

His eyes were staring, his voice trembled: "It's a wide empty land that goes on forever. Nothing alive; just ash-gray mud and iron-gray sky with no sun. And when you come there, soon you notice a movement on the horizon, and the personage you saw a few minutes

ago comes stalking across the waste, and you can't escape because your feet are buried in the mud. And he eats you, swallows your screams and your blood and bones — I've seen it! — unless you know how to get away. To get to another body. Please don't send me there. Please! I'll give you anything. I want to live. I just want to live!"

The man knelt in front of Butler, his head bowed.

"Please," he said.

Butler threw the blood on him.

There was a tremendous flash and explosion, as if lightning had hit the room. Smoke billowed, and Butler couldn't see. The woman he held shuddered and cried out. He let her drop. Something moved rapidly in front of him, blowing the smoke away. As it cleared, he saw the gray-haired man suspended in the air, arms straight out from his sides, spinning as fast as a fan blade. As Butler watched, suddenly it was Jean spinning, then a fat old lady, then shapes and colors of people he didn't recognize, spinning and gone, spinning and gone. A hubbub of voices was in Butler's ears, rising to a roar, to a shriek, rising more and more. He ran, half fell down the stairs to the basement. There was a can of gasoline in the furnace room. He took it and unbolted the door to the room with the old woman.

"Butler," she whimpered. He grabbed her skinny arm, pulled her close to him.

"Do you want to die?" he asked her.

"Oh, yes, yes," she cackled. "Yes, yes, yes."

He dragged her and the gasoline can up the stairs until they were at the door to the upper hall. He stood her against the door, unscrewed the cap and poured gasoline over the woman, the door, the stairs. The smell of it filled his head. He thrust his cigarette lighter into her hands.

"Count to thirty."

He struggled out the basement window, ran across the lawn. He made himself close the garden gate casually, walk leisurely to his car. The sun was shining cold through high, thin clouds. A few birds sang. He drove slowly, turned down the hill toward the city. Ten blocks down there was a tiny park with benches, unkempt trees, a few rose-bushes. He parked and sat on a bench facing the hill. The park was empty, quiet, sleepy. The bench was almost warm in the weak sunlight. On an untrimmed bush nearby was a single rose, blood-red, the last of the season, its petals ready to fall. Butler watched the hill. In a little while, smoke came from a place near the top. The smoke got dark and thick and rose straight into the sky. A few minutes later, firetruck sirens sounded in the distance. They seemed to blend with something else, a long, inhuman wail that faded into the quiet air.

The afternoon wore on. In an hour the smoke got less, and after awhile it stopped altogether. Butler sat in the long quiet sunlight. A few birds sang, and a dog barked somewhere down the street.

Finally, he stirred.

"Jean," he murmured.

A little wind blew then, and the petals of the rose scattered over him.

— ABO —



FROM THE BOOKSHELF

By Janice M. Eisen

New Views of Familiar Landscapes

Desolation Road
By Ian McDonald
Bantam/Spectra, 1988
355 pp., \$3.95

Mars was once a favored set-

sical, satirical, and enigmatic.

McDonald is a truly original stylist, somewhat reminiscent of Jack Vance, yet still somehow unique. This is a dangerous trick for a writer to attempt, because if he fails the book will be unreadable. McDonald pulls it off, and his prose sings. But there is much more to the book; the author tells a real story populated by real characters. *Desolation Road* and its inhabitants will haunt you.

McDonald's Mars is rich, living, and endlessly fascinating, and this novel is poetic, moving, and unforgettable. It deserves to be a classic.

Rating: ★★★★★

When Gravity Fails
By George Alec Effinger
Bantam/Spectra, 1988
276 pp., \$3.95

I've been a fan of George Alec Effinger's work for years, and this novel seems to be finally getting him the attention he deserves. *When Gravity Fails* shows what happens when a top-notch writer takes a standard setting and runs with it.

The novel starts off with a cyberpunk-like setting but rapidly turns into something new and original. It's set in an unnamed Arab country, and the Arab ambience permeates the book, making the setting even more exotic and fascinating. The common cyberpunk idea of computerized brain implants is integral to the story, not just window dressing, and the implants and the rest of the background feel real.

When Gravity Fails is also an excellent hard-boiled detective

story. The hero is strikingly traditional for that form — hard-drinking (and drugging), independent, tied to his own sense of honor, wary of emotional ties, unremitting in pursuit — but



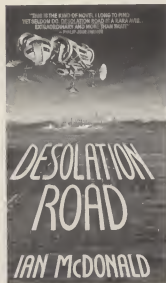
brought up to date. It's a great thriller; once I started it, I couldn't put it down.

(Warning: The back cover blurb gives away an important part of the mystery. I wish publishers wouldn't do that.)

The book is very well-written and absorbing, with lots of black humor. Though the characters are sleazy, you care about them. I strongly recommend *When Gravity Fails*; it's a worthy addition to Effinger's previous work.

Rating: ★★★★★½

The Shadow of His Wings
By Bruce Fergusson
Avon, 1988
278 pp., \$2.95



ting for science fiction, but its popularity faded when it proved to be a dead world. Ian McDonald reclaims the planet in his brilliant first novel.

This is a terraformed Mars, many centuries from now, which is still being improved and settled, and the book is the story of the birth, life, and death of a small town named *Desolation Road*. It is by turns funny, tragic, bizarre, technological, mystical, whim-

RATING SYSTEM

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Very good
★★★	Good
★★	Fair
★	Poor

Bruce Fergusson's first novel is an extremely well done and non-clichéd heroic fantasy. The book is absorbing and intelligent, involving you right from the beginning. It's full of excellent, well-drawn characters and terrific details.

For centuries, the people of Myrcia have paid tribute to Rizzix the Erseiy, an immortal winged creature. Now Myrcia is losing a war, and the tyrannical Sanctos has offered his throne to anyone who can persuade Rizzix to come to the country's aid. After a series of misadventures, including combat and imprisonment, a young man named Lukan finds himself joining the quest.

redeemed by the hero. I also appreciate the way Fergusson violates typical expectations by not ending the book with the quest's success. One scene with a little girl is charming, unexpected, and important to the plot and characterization, and it is just one of many such unexpected touches.

Nothing in the book rings false; to use Ursula Le Guin's metaphor, we never leave Elfland and find ourselves in Poughkeepsie. *The Shadow of His Wings* is beautifully written, and I highly recommend it.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Metrophage
By Richard Kadrey
Ace, 1988
240 pp., \$2.95

The late Terry Carr's Ace Specials have introduced many talented new SF authors to the field, most recently including William Gibson, Lucius Shepard, and Kim Stanley Robinson. From Richard Kadrey's first novel, it's hard to tell whether he will have the same success.

Metrophage is well written, but it suffers from its standard cyberpunk/*Bladerunner*/*Max Headroom* setting (it's amazing how quickly that's become a cliché). Kadrey includes lots of good descriptive details, and I like his use of a surrealist/Dada aesthetic, but there aren't enough of these original touches to prevent a feeling of *deja vu*.

Jonny Qabbala, the protagonist, is a small-time drug dealer and former cop who must join with a bunch of anarchist doctors to fight the cops, rival smuggler lords, and international spies he's somehow found himself in the middle of; he also turns out to be the key to a new plague that is sweeping L.A.

Jonny's adventures are interesting and suspenseful, but he's such a loser and screw-up that it's difficult to empathize with him. Also, he is passive too much of the time; things keep happening to him.

Though I've been pointing out the flaws in the novel, there's obviously a lot of talent here. I'd like to see more of Kadrey's work, but

he should try a more original setting. I think he has it in him.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Polyphemus
By Michael Shea
Arkham House, 1987
245 pp., \$16.95

Despite being published by Arkham House, and despite its billing on the inside flap as "a grimoire of gore," *Polyphemus* is not a horror collection, but a collection of horrific fiction. If I were pushed to classify the stories, I'd say four were science fiction, two horror, and one fantasy; all, however, are filled with Michael Shea's grotesque vision. Don't read them alone at night.



The real adventures, however, begin after he returns.

Fergusson follows the realistic school of medieval fantasy worlds; the background feels concrete and disgusting. His characterization is excellent. Lukan is obviously a white hat from the start, but he's believable and you really care about him. The evil Sanctos is a little overdrawn, but that's traditional in this form. The Erseiy, while at first glance reminiscent of dragons, is different and is a convincing and sympathetic alien character.

I like the intense sibling rivalry which is at the book's core, as well as the not-so-good woman



Shea takes standard plots — the problem story ("Polyphemus"), the alien visitor in human form ("Angel of Death"), the alien parasite in a human host ("Autopsy") — and revives them with his vivid imaginings of terror. For example, a selection from his book *Niff the Lean*, "Pearls of the Vampire Queen," is picaresque fantasy (reminiscent of Leiber's *Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser*), but Shea weaves in clinically portrayed vampirism.

My favorite story in the collection is "Angel of Death," apparently based on the "Son of Sam" killings. There are no clinkers in the book. The weakest

POLYPHEMUS

MICHAEL SHEA



story is "The Extra" — straightforward SF that moves too far from Shea's unique vision — but even that is very good.

Polyphemus is an excellent and scary collection. Shea demonstrates what a boundary bender can do to make us rethink our definitions.

Rating: ★★☆☆

Never the Twain

By Kirk Mitchell

Ace, 1987

294 pp., \$3.50

Never the Twain is a light-hearted, well-done time travel story. Howard Hart is the last living descendant of the obscure Western novelist Bret Harte. Desperately in need of money, Howard determines to use his nerdy friend's discovery of gateways to the past to abort Mark Twain's career, in the belief that Twain's honors and riches will then go to Harte.

This idea is intriguing, and the historical detail of the period is very well done. Mitchell has really thought through the implications of this sort of expedition into the past, and it's fun to watch Howard wriggle through the snares of Civil War-era politics.

The book's main flaw is its characters. It's tough for an author when his main character has almost no redeeming characteristics, but Mitchell handles it pretty well as, typically, Hart is redeemed by the love of a good



woman. The other characters are much less interesting because they are stereotypes; in particular, I could have done without the Whore with a Heart of Gold.

Nevertheless, the book is enjoyable. The suspense builds up nicely towards the end — I stayed up too late finishing it. In spite of the character problems, *Never the Twain* is fun to read.

Rating: ★★½

The Blind Archer

By John Gregory Betancourt

Avon, 1988

233 pp., \$2.95

John Betancourt's new novel follows a standard fantasy plot: a young, impatient wizard's apprentice must learn patience and wisdom while saving the world. (The story is most reminiscent of Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*.) However, Betancourt has hung some interesting details on this plot, and it held my attention.

Ker Orrum, the main character is, traditionally, annoyingly hot-headed and dense. There were many times I wanted to give him a swift kick, but that's part of the charm of this form. He's certainly a believable character, and I did wind up rooting for him.

A more serious problem is that Ker conveniently forgets and misinterprets something that



happens early on. Anyone who's read much fantasy will figure out the meaning of that episode right away, and I think Ker's quest to save the world would be more meaningful if he realized the event's importance earlier.

The Blind Archer is essentially an adolescent novel, but that's not meant as an insult. It's well-done and worth reading. The setting is intriguing, particularly the myths and legends surrounding the gods. Apparently this book is the first of a series — though, unlike many such books, it does stand alone — and I'll be watching for future volumes.

Rating: ★★☆☆

True Jaguar

By Warren Norwood

Bantam/Spectra, 1988

336 pp., \$3.95

It's not often that you run across a fantasy that is truly original, but *True Jaguar* is one. Warren Norwood's new novel is based on the beliefs of the Mayans. It is stranger to the reader than another unfamiliar mythos might be, because it does not spring from European tradition and its logic is not our logic. The story has its own internal consistency which takes some getting used to. Eventually you do fall into the world of the Mayan myth.

Jesus O'Hara Martinez, a thoroughly Americanized employee of General Dynamics (he uses the name Martin O'Hara), goes on vacation and is confronted by a Guatemalan man who knows too much about him. This stranger believes Martin is the descendant of Seven Jaguar, the son of Great True Jaguar, and must save the Earth from destruction by a comet. After a long interrogation by the Defense Security Agency, Martin, along with the Guatemalan and a renegade DSA agent, sets off for Xibalba, the Mayan underworld, to save the world by winning a game.

Playing basketball with the lords of Hell to prevent a comet from hitting the Earth doesn't resemble the quests we're accustomed to, and I've greatly oversimplified the plot. The heroes are not sure what's expected of them, especially the main character, who wasn't at all familiar with this mythos to begin with. Martin's complete ignorance of Mayan mythology provides an excuse to explain it to the reader, and it's bizarre and fascinating. The characters find things more and more confusing as they move toward the climax, and so did I.

By setting the beginning of the novel in the real world (if the DSA can be considered "real"), Norwood establishes the characters convincingly and creates an even stronger feeling of strangeness in Xibalba. This is not an easy book, but it is a good one.

Rating: ☆☆☆

*The Armageddon Blues:
A Tale of the Great Wheel
of Existence*

By Daniel Keys Moran
Bantam/Spectra, 1988
224 pp., \$3.95

Now to the strangest book in this column: *The Armageddon Blues*, a bizarre time travel/post-holocaust/alternate history novel written in the fragmented style of John dos Passos. Daniel Keys Moran (not to be confused with Daniel Moran, a pseudonym of Robert E. Vardeman) has

written an ambitious, fast-paced, intelligent book.

In the year 2007, nuclear war destroys civilization. More than 700 years later, aliens who travel among the timelines land their disabled craft in what used to be California and encounter a tribe called Clan Silver-Eyes. The aliens share their knowledge and technology, as well as their telepathic ability. A young woman named Jalian of the Fires steals some equipment and travels back along her timeline to 1962, with the intention of preventing Armageddon. This will, of course, also erase the existence of Jalian's people, who are not happy about that.

Things get even stranger in 1968, when Jalian encounters Georges Mordreaux, a 256-year-old man who is a localized anti-entropy field. They begin working together, laying the groundwork for the organization that will prevent the nuclear holocaust. It's a complex plot, with lots of different story threads, but it maintains suspense and all the loose ends get tied up. However, towards the end of the book, things become quite confusing and hard to follow.

Moran's characters (including three computers) are fascinating, although Jalian can become tiresome — she's arrogant, unbending, self-important, and completely lacking in compassion. There are perhaps too many characters; they're hard to keep straight after a while. While this is a serious book, it is often funny, especially when dealing with Jalian's obsession with freeways.

The Armageddon Blues demonstrates a great deal of talent, and it's certainly worth your while.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

The Hormone Jungle

By Robert Reed
Donald I. Fine, 1988
300 pp., \$17.95

Robert Reed's second novel is interesting and absorbing, if not entirely successful. It is hard-edged, suspenseful, and complex — maybe too complex.

The Hormone Jungle is set in a far future in which man has terraformed the inner planets, many asteroids and moons, and even comets in the Oort cloud, and each of these colonies has its own history and culture. Biotechnology has been developed to a very high level: most buildings and many other items are genetically engineered organisms. Many dead people live on as Ghosts, having had their minds transferred into computers; there is also limited artificial intelligence.

There's an immense amount of background and detail to be explained, in fact too much. Though the details are fascinating and well thought out, the book takes too long to get going, with the first few chapters almost wholly devoted to exposition.

It's worth plodding through the opening chapters to get to the action, but some readers might not make it that far, which is a shame. The book uses an old suspense plot — the (incredibly) hard-boiled hero and the beautiful woman in distress who tricks him into danger — but Reed makes it his own.

The author doesn't take the shortcut of using easy, stereotyped characters. The characters are a varied lot, ranging from a cyborg who is a miner on Mercury to a genetically engineered sex toy, and they have some surprises for the reader. In general, the characterization is very good, except that not enough time is spent to help the reader understand a pivotal character who is more than a little crazy.

The novel is written in the present tense; this is disconcerting for a while, but you get used to it. I'm not sure anything is gained by it, though. The prose is sharp and clear.

I have one major complaint, which is the fault of the publisher, not Reed: very poor copy editing. I'm not talking about occasional typos; certain words are consistently spelled wrong or misused. This book deserves better from the publisher.


The Hormone Jungle is well

(Continued to page 51)

EDITOR'S NOTES

By Charles C. Ryan

Where Did You Come From?



Sorry to disappoint you, but this is not exactly a column about the birds and bees. Magazines do it differently.

A letter we received recently from a subscriber raised a question about how we are growing here at *ABO* and how it might impact you, our subscriber.

Our primary source of growth is through subscriptions and we get most of our subscribers through direct-mail solicitations — euphemistically called “junk mail” by those who don’t want to get it. But what is junk to one person, can be important to another.

The letter was from a subscriber who had just received three mailing pieces from us within one week.

“Isn’t this wasteful?” he asked. On the surface, you might think that he is right, that it is wasteful to send several solicitations to the same person.

Another subscriber received a mailing and wrote in to ask if his application for a subscription, mailed three weeks earlier, had gotten lost in the mail. “Why else would you be sending me another solicitation?” he wondered.

The answers are simple. No, it isn’t wasteful — at least not when you compare direct mail to other methods of selling magazines. And, yes, even though you are already a subscriber, you may get some more “junk mail” from us.

Let me explain.

We mail out an advertising brochure to lists of known science fiction fans that we rent from other companies — including the other SF magazines.

The subscribers I mentioned at the beginning got more than one mailing because they have subscribed to more than one of the small SF magazines — it’s that simple. And now you’ll get it again because we’re going back to the lists we got you from.

Statistically, only a relatively small percentage of people respond to such mailings — even if they would really love *ABO*. This means that the

list we rented to get your name (unless you subscribed through another avenue) still contains quite a few people who aren’t subscribers yet. (Yeah, we can’t imagine why either.)

We know that when they finally do subscribe they will kick themselves for not subscribing sooner, so it is our sworn duty to help them see the light.

We do that by going back and using the same list we rented once before. Which is what we began doing in April.

That means that even though you are already a subscriber, you will probably get one or more mailings from us, depending on how many SF books or magazines you buy through the mail. It’s up to you whether you want to treat it like junk mail and toss it, or do a friend (and us) a favor and give it to him, or her — after all, anyone who likes SF will love *ABO*.

A special anthology

When you get the new mailing, you’ll note that we will be offering a special magazine-sized full-color full-slick anthology as a bonus to those who subscribe for 12 or more issues at the new, higher payment rate.

If you recently renewed your subscription (or renew now) for 12 or more issues, you are entitled to one also for only \$2 (it retails for \$4.50). If you paid the full new rate for your renewal — \$24 for 12 issues, or \$32 for 18 — then send us a proof of that payment and we’ll forward you a copy of the anthology at no additional charge. The anthology has 12 of the best short stories we published in our first seven issues and the art for those stories is being reprinted in full color on slick paper.

We’ll be printing the anthology the first part of May, so please allow six to eight weeks for normal processing of your requests.

Remember, the anthology is \$4.50 if bought separately, \$2 if you renewed for 12 or more issues at the old rate, or free if you paid the full rate for your renewal.

Speaking of renewals ... my circulation department has asked that I mention this:

When you take advantage of our special self-renewal offer and renew before we mail you for a renewal please mark it as a renewal.

A number of people have sent in renewals without marking them as renewals, which means they get entered as a new subscriber and will probably get a note saying they didn’t pay enough for a full subscription.

This means that instead of extending your existing subscription, you add a second and get two copies of the magazine and confuse our paperwork.

One reader, who confessed to such a mishap, said it was okay because he has two eyestalks and it was fun to read the magazines in stereo.

For the rest of us, however, two copies of the same issue means one is wasted.

We have received quite a few self-renewals — one of our dumb ideas that apparently really works — so that has made things a bit complicated for our underpaid, overworked circulation department.

So, have a heart, and mark your renewals and send the renewals to Dept. R.

What? You haven’t renewed yet?

That means we’ll have to put you on our renewal mailing list — expect to get 1,000,000 renewal letters (we want to make sure you don’t forget) over the next few months.

Talk about wasteful ...

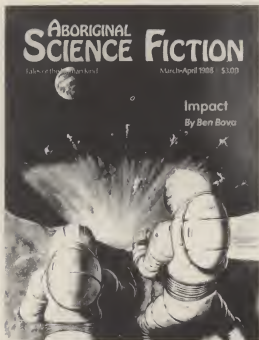
A date change

The next issue of *ABO* that you receive will not have a July/August cover date — it will have a Sept./Oct. cover date.

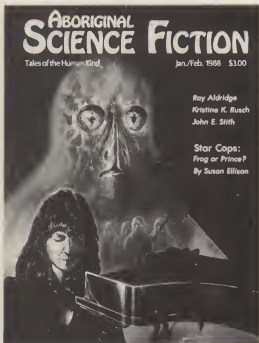
No, you aren’t missing an issue. It will still be issue #11. We are making the change to get *ABO* in line with the dating system our distributor uses for all the other publications it handles.

Until next time ...

— ABO —



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THROUGH THE LENS

By Susan Ellison

From the Fifth Dimension: The Twilight Zone Returns!

The *Twilight Zone* is actually old news. If we count Rod Serling's 1970-73 NBC series *Night Gallery* as a variant, this is the fourth incarnation for the fantasy anthology. Despite having gone four seasons in a half-hour format (1959-1962, 1963-1964), one season as an hour-long version (1963), having been revived most recently for two seasons (1985-87), and now being considered in retrospect a classic, almost mythic, success, TZ was, in fact, always beaten in the ratings. As Marc Scott Zicree has documented in *The Twilight Zone Companion*, it was always in danger of being canceled. It hung on by its fingernails, principally because it was a show wholly owned by CBS, and thus the profit margin was greater. In truth, only in syndication has TZ been successful.

Now, *The Twilight Zone* returns in a third incarnation to be aired in the fall of 1988.

J. Michael Straczynski, one of the three story editors on the new show, talks about the forthcoming syndicated version and what they hope to achieve in this latest manifestation of *The Twilight Zone*. Straczynski was interviewed for *Aboriginal Science Fiction* on December 19, 1987, in Los Angeles, by Susan Ellison.

ABO: When were you first approached to work on the new '88 version of TZ?

STRACZYNSKI: It was around late September, I believe. I had previously done one episode of the Zone called *What Are Friends For?* (not my title ... the producer's title).

Mark Shelmerdine — who produced *I, Claudius*, one of the

niftiest pieces of television I've seen in a long time — had been contracted to produce thirty half-hours of TZ for syndication. He then looked around for people who had an approach he liked and were not currently on staff somewhere. Many of those who had worked on the previous Zone were busy on various assignments: Jim Crocker was on a project, Michael Cassutt was then on *Max Headroom*, Marty Pasko and Becky Parr were doing *B-Men*, and so the old staff were pretty much tied up. Mark then went to people who had done freelance contributions for the show. He screened a lot of episodes to see who had the kind of approach he was looking for. Of those he liked, one was *What Are Friends For?*, but I was then story editing *Captain Power*, a live action, science fiction series, so he thought I was going to be tied up. When he heard I was leaving and going to be available, he called me in very quickly and we had a meeting which lasted about twenty minutes. What impressed me about Shelmerdine was his intelligence, his humanity, his dedication to doing topics of great interest and controversy. That appealed to me greatly.

About a week or two later, he called to tell me he was going to hire me on staff. Also hired as story editors for the show were Jeremy Finch and Paul Chitlik, who did an episode of the Zone called *Aqua Vita*.

We started on October 13th and we now have about thirteen stories in the works. Well, as of right now, with someone upstairs typing, we have fourteen in the works. (While the interview is taking place, thirty feet away, in his office, Harlan Ellison is writ-

ing a teleplay outline for the new series called *Crazy As A Soup Sandwich*.)

Basically, that's how I got in to it.

ABO: Will the syndicated series be all new episodes?

STRACZYNSKI: No. They are taking the two seasons of network Zones and editing them down to half-hours. This means taking some of the forty-minute shows and chopping them down to thirty, which is unfortunate because there are many good shows which will now only be seen in a truncated form. There are two exceptions to this: *A Message From Charity* and *Her Pilgrim Soul*, both written by Alan Brennert, which are being done as two-parters. Not only are they complete, we are adding footage, outtakes and such, to fill them up to four full half-hours. We're also taking the shorter ones and putting two together in a show. Those that can't fit we'll just scuttle.

The new Zone will total ninety episodes — sixty from the old show and thirty new ones. I believe that ours will be the first aired, then we'll have the old ones later. Possibly they'll be mixed up together; I'm not quite sure.

ABO: What special qualities are possessed by the new producer, Mark Shelmerdine, and you, and the other two story editors, that promise anything different, or better, than the qualities possessed by the original TZ staff — Serling, producer Buck Houghton, writers Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, Earl Hamner, Jr., et al — and by the revival version staff — Philip DeGuere, Jim Crocker, Alan Brennert, Harlan Ellison and Rock O'Bannon? If they couldn't make it a commercial ratings

success, why do you think you can?

STRACZYNSKI: We cannot compare ourselves to the original crew of *Zone*. What we are trying to do is go back to the original spirit of the show. One of our staff commented on the fact that, if anything stands out about Rod Serling, it is the sense of humanity in his work, a willingness to use metaphor to take on the social issues of the time. We are attempting to bring that back into the show.

We differ from the recent *Twilight Zone* in that a lot of the shows were kind of nihilistic and dark. In many of them there was a lack of humanity, the exceptions being Alan Brennert's work, Harlan's work and a few other good writers, but there was just something missing in most of them.

ABO: Can you define what was missing?

STRACZYNSKI: They had a lot of money, compared to us, on the show. When you have a great deal of money, you tend to have more latitude in the kind of stories you tell, which is both good and bad. I think the recent *Zone* lapsed more into flash and dazzle and gimmicks than straight-on character stories, with exceptions. Since our budget is limited we are taking a more confined approach with the emphasis more on pure story telling. Mark (Shelmerdine) wants this to be seen as the closest thing possible to what Rod did.

I think the recent *Zone* tried to do *Twilight Zone* of the '80s and lost *Twilight Zone* of the '50s; we're trying to combine the two.

ABO: You have gone on record, as has your producer, in saying you will be "returning to the original Serling vision" of *TZ*. But not even Serling chose to repeat the exact formula when he did *Night Gallery*. At that time he expressed the opinion that times, and the taste and sophistication of the viewing audience, had changed. So he went in a new direction. Do you really think you can return to the one-punch ending style of the 1959 version? And if so, what benefit will that have?

STRACZYNSKI: I wouldn't



J. Michael Straczynski

say it's back to the one-punch story. There is, in many ways, a twist in the story somewhere. We're doing a story on alcoholism which has a really nasty, nasty turn to it. It's called *The Hellgremmite Method*, written by Bill Selby; it's a cure for alcoholism which is very strange. We're also doing stories on terrorism, religion, charlatans, and the price of crimes past, and basic human loneliness. These are our themes, but we paint them against the backdrop of the supernatural or surreal, of people in conflict. We have taken the "nut" of the Serling stories — ordinary people in extraordinary situations — and used topics currently of interest; the result being, the combination still works.

ABO: Are there any types of stories you are avoiding?

STRACZYNSKI: Dumb stories mainly. We have a list of stories which we have seen *ad infinitum*; we call them the:

"Whoops! I'm dead but didn't know it."

"Whoops! I'm a robot but didn't know it."

"Whoops! I'm Adam, you're Eve. What a coincidence!"

We're looking to move away from the obvious stories, but we really have no hard and fast

rules. If a story gets our interest, makes a point and is dramatically sound, then we'll go for it. We'll go anywhere for a good story. For instance, a couple of unknown writers sent in a release form and script, they had no agent, and got an assignment.

ABO: Why isn't the producer, Mark Shelmerdine, adapting from already published fantasy stories of accepted originality? Is it your belief that tv writers of a generation raised on sitcoms and rehashes of tired themes we've seen for forty years are better equipped to come up with fresh ideas that the fantasy writers on the bookshelves haven't already mined?

STRACZYNSKI: Mark and I discussed this at length. The belief is that a short story is perfect unto itself. And in most cases where you try to adapt, you lose something in the translation. It's better to start off with something original, which fits all the requirements of the medium. I don't entirely agree with this, but in time I think we'll find a middle ground. I pushed a Kurt Vonnegut story and a couple of Howard Fast stories on him last week, and though he didn't pick any of them, it still might happen.

ABO: You stated previously

that Mark was open to controversial stories, yet you didn't want to do the *Nackles* story, whose rejection by CBS compelled Harlan Ellison to leave TZ. Why?

STRACZYNSKI: A number of reasons. *Nackles* was designed to be a very short sting between two rather saccharine stories. It was all one act, fourteen pages long. To do that story now, it would have to be expanded to 23-24 pages; to fit, the story would have to be changed a great deal, and we weren't sure if those changes would help or hurt the story. There were also some concerns that it could be perceived as racist, even though it obviously is not. It is, in fact, a considerably biting statement against racism.

ABO: It's very anti-racist!

STRACZYNSKI: Precisely. That, however, was a very low-level concern. Our first concern was taking this piece and adapting it to a full half-hour, which we felt would damage the story. However, we are doing *The Cold Equations*, which is one of the most famous science fiction stories around, and controversial!

ABO: Can you give us the basic plots of two new stories that have been written for the show?

STRACZYNSKI: No. We are very proud of the stories we have in the works right now. They are all kind of contingent on certain surprises built into them; to betray them would diminish the impact of the episodes when they're aired.

I can say that some of our writers include Robert Walden (the actor-writer on *Lou Grant*), Alan Brennert, Haskell Barkin and Michael Reaves. I'm also doing a couple, as are Paul and Jeremy.

As I've mentioned, Harlan is writing an outline. Knowing that a talent as vast and substantial as Harlan's should not be fettered by the bonds of bureaucracy, we have given Harlan something exceedingly rare in television: a blind commitment. An outline with an option for teleplay. We don't know what it's going to be! Usually, the process is: you come in, tell us a story, we like it and you get the assignment. We have short-circuited that process. Harlan is to write whatever he wants to write. We wanted him to work on the show, so we thought that by freeing him from having to pass his ideas past us and letting him skip to story, he will give us something of great value.

ABO: Are you interested in just straight fantasy stories, or are you hoping to illustrate problems in the '80s, using a fantasy framework?

STRACZYNSKI: Primarily the latter. We have a couple of stories which are straight ahead fantasy or science fiction, but by and large, they have social context, they have some meaning beyond just the drama. As Harlan himself has said: (At this point, Straczynski paraphrased remarks by Harlan Ellison. The complete quote appears below as footnote 1.)

ABO: Are there any writers you would like to see write for the show, such as Richard Matheson, who wrote for the original *Zone*?

STRACZYNSKI: We have gone after a wide range of writers. What you must understand is, not all the writers we approach will be available or interested. Richard Matheson only works as a consultant. However, Richard Christian Matheson may write a script for us, if we can find

one of his stories to adapt.

ABO: I thought you weren't adapting stories.

STRACZYNSKI: Again, there are no hard and fast rules. I said by and large we are not adapting stories, but if we can do a Richard Christian Matheson story, we'll work it out. We came close to doing a couple of Dennis Etchison stories, which he was going to adapt for us — it didn't work out, but that may change. Howard Fast has agreed to adapt one of his stories for us. William Gibson has also expressed an interest in writing for us. Most people we've asked are interested; now it's a question of availability and time.

ABO: In what form do you plan to use narration? Will it be an on-screen narrator; in which case, will there be a problem with the ghost of Rod Serling? Or, will you go the way of the second version and use an off-screen narrator; or will you take another direction entirely and, for instance, use a woman?

STRACZYNSKI: Interesting question. We were quite open to using a woman and auditioned a number of them, but eventually we found an actor who was spot-on. He'll be doing the opening and closing narrations, and be off-camera. He'll also re-do the narrations from the recent *Zone*, so all the voices are the same.

ABO: I understand the show is being shot in Toronto, in March. Why shoot in Canada?

STRACZYNSKI: The show's being done in Canada for primarily financial reasons. We have a choice, we can either produce a half-hour show filmed in Toronto, or purchase fifteen minutes in Los Angeles. In

1. "The saddest rationale and apology offered for what television foists off on us most of the time, is that it's at least 'entertaining.' It's bogus, because 'entertaining' is an unquantifiable attribute. Bear-baiting and slasher movies are 'entertaining' to a kind of mentality, but they offer nothing above that momentary titillation. By that non-standard of worthiness, even a flaming stick in the eye can be classed as 'entertainment.' Even the lowliest storyteller understands that the job of art, high or low or

in-between, demands that it be entertaining, at the least. It's like suiting up for a ballgame. It's the *minimum* requirement, to be entertaining; and it's open to neither argument nor credit. It's just the bottom line. The tragic aspect of that defense is that it becomes a refuge for the inept and exploitive. If they are required to produce nothing above the level of 'entertaining,' then they are exempt from striving for the elements that make creative effort,

whether pop art or High Art or anything in-between, anything but cheap thrills. But when the work struggles toward something greater — to inform or uplift or anger or challenge us — it makes claim to being considered as worthy as books or films or paintings or sculpture. It is the question of whether something as powerful as television has the responsibility to try for lasting value or can be allowed to settle for just being 'entertaining.' And if it doesn't have some lasting value, then the work demeans the term 'entertaining.' "

Toronto, with the rate of exchange and certain tax breaks, we can accomplish quite a bit. There are problems, of course; we have to have "Canadian content," which means that if you have an American writer, you must have a Canadian director, it's non-negotiable. Also, certain portions of the cast must be Canadian. You're also limited to the sets available; you can't go to the Queen Mary, it isn't there.

On the positive side, we're impressed with the studio, Atlantis Films, that is producing the show. They do *The Ray Bradbury Theater* for HBO, which is shot on film; our show is also being shot on film, so we hope it will have a very nice look to it.

ABO: Summing up: Do you honestly think the public will be ready to watch another anthology show after the recent demise of

the last Twilight Zone?

STRACZYNSKI: In a network show, you must reach a vastly larger audience to make a profit. In syndication, you can reach fewer people and still make a profit.

Tales From The Darkside is an enormously popular, successful show. It costs spare change to make. They've done on the order of 80 to 100 shows now and the stations are clamoring for more. Laurel TV has at least two more anthology shows in the works because of *Darkside*.

We are confident that

Twilight Zone, this time to be distributed by MGM/UA, will succeed in syndication. Our hope is that it will hit the syndicated market and that the *Twilight Zone* name will attract more than might be attracted to *Tales From The Darkside*; it's a name that's been good to stations.

We think it will succeed and, because there's no network interference, we will be able to do a much wider range of stories.

We have a really good shot at making it work.

— ABO —

A Speaking Likeness

(Continued from page 28)

her cabin. Saul stretched out in the sunny spot at the center of the compound and let the Kul voices put him to sleep.

Finally the singing stopped. Saul hauled himself to his feet and prepared to look busy. The door of Melissa's cabin opened and the Kul appeared — two of them, followed by Lissy, followed by the other three. Lissy was naked, and smeared red from face to feet.

Saul's cry brought Lorraine, who called Gerald; they stood together, backs pressed against Lorraine's cabin, facing Lissy and her guard. The Kul began to sing. They sang until the sky dimmed, but now none of the humans found the song tedious; none turned to other tasks. Even with the Kul inflections added, the burden of the song was startlingly familiar. "(We) show (you) Melissa," the Kul sang. "(Here is) Melissa. (Here is) Melissa. (Here is) Melissa."

At last, from the trees around the camp, came answering song.

— ABO —

Classifieds

(Classified ads are \$12 per column inch or 40¢ per word. A classified column is 2 1/4 inches wide. Payment must accompany all classified orders. There is a 5% discount for running the same ad 6 times; a 10% discount for running the same ad 12 times.)

FREE SAMPLE Fantasy Mongers Quarterly, catalog (includes new Brian Lumley books: *Hero of Dreams*, *Compelet Crow*, etc.) 22-cent stamp: Ganley, Box 149, Buffalo, NY 14226. 1-9

I'VE BEEN SELLING reasonably priced science fiction, fantasy and horror paperbacks, hardcovers and magazines since 1967. Free catalogs! Pandora's Books Ltd., Box ABO-54, Neche, ND 58265. 1-9

SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY books and magazines (new and used). Send \$1.00 for 64-page catalog. Collections purchased, large or small. Robert A. Madle, 4406 Bestor Drive, Rockville, MD, 20853. I-11

VOLUNTEERS SOUGHT for Aboriginal SF. Our magazine is growing and we need some part-time help. Volunteers must have their own transportation and live within commuting distance and be hard workers. A minimum commitment of 10 hours a week is required. There is a modest hourly payment for some of the office jobs. To apply, send a resume to: *Aboriginal SF*, Volunteer Dept., P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.

From the Bookshelf

(Continued from page 45)

worth reading. It's exciting once it gets going, but you need to read carefully or you'll miss the subtle details. I'm looking forward to

seeing more of Reed's work.

Rating: ☆ ☆ ☆ 1/2

— ABO —



I've always believed in reincarnation, but I didn't think I would have to start from the beginning.

Boomerangs

(Continued from page 23)

of SF/Fantasy music (and speech) tapes, and selling them by mail, at SF conventions, and even in some stores. The largest companies are DAG Productions and Off Centaur Publications, and between these two companies a plethora of material is produced. The latest Off Centaur catalog included over 80 tapes, 20 songbooks, and a variety of other materials (some produced elsewhere, and some re-published by Off Centaur from out-of-print materials). The DAG catalog has almost 30 tapes listed. A review of 3 to 4 titles per issue would mean that it would be a number of years before the review would be covering current titles (unless, of course, it started with current titles and included some older titles as it went along).

I am not suggesting that I should write such a column, although I would be willing to, but that somebody should write such a column. If you have room for two book review columns, you should have room for one half-page music review column.

If you don't think that folk songs are important music, go to a convention and listen to some folk. Good cons would be Boskone, MileHiCon, any WorldCon, Bayfilk, Ohio Valley Filk Festival (OVFF), FilkCon West, and ConChord. Or just look through the Off Centaur catalog (Off Centaur Publications, P.O. Box 424, El Cerrito, Ca. 94530) — the catalog is free.

Sincerely,
Gerald L. Bliss
Colorado Springs, Colorado

(At the moment, we do not have the space to add any more columns. I don't know whether a music review column would reach a large enough audience to justify its space. Maybe. Let's see what our readers think ... — Ed.)

Dear Charlie,

My best friend enjoyed her first issue of ABO so much she showed it to some members of the Nashville SF Club who also enjoyed it very much.

I am enclosing a check for the renewal of my subscription. I know I am just squeaking under the deadline (You did. — Ed.) for the special rate. I had to wait for a payday when I didn't have too many other bills. Monetary limitations can be such a pain sometimes.

I like the slick paper very much. I am also very glad that you decided to bag the magazine. I hate those pesky labels, too.

Yours,

Mary Parsly
Nashville, Tenn.

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I've been a subscriber since the first issue showed up in my mailbox. You have an excellent magazine. You could put together a good "Best of ABO" collection right now. (We have. See Editor's Notes in this issue. — Ed.)

Here's my check for a copy of your other collection, *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo*.

Rubin C. Burk
Brea, Calif.

Dear Editor,

Reference "Our Renewal Policy," ABO SF March/April 1988: Since your magazine is bimonthly, shouldn't renewal also be bimonthly dates? The special renewal rate examples you gave were:

Issue #12 31 Mar. 88 for Sept.-Oct. 88 — 6 months advance.

Issue #13 30 April 88 for Nov. Dec. 88 — 7 months advance.

I believe you intended six months advance, did you not, making special renewal dates bimonthly, as in March 88 for Sept.-Oct. 88 and May 88 for Nov. Dec. and thusly.

Sincerely,
Charles E. Upchurch
Washington, DC

(Yes, you're right. Except we actually extended the March date because we failed to include the clip-out coupon the first time we announced the closing date. You are correct, however, in that the discounted renewal is only valid if you renew six months before the expiration issue, or three issues in advance. We prefer to go by issue numbers, however, since we are changing cover dates and at some point expect to publish on a monthly schedule. This is issue #10. Those whose subscription expires with issue #13, must self-renew by May 30 to get the discounted rate. Those whose subscriptions expire with issue #14, only have until July 31 to self-renew at the discounted rate, and so on on a bimonthly basis — until we switch to monthly publication. — Ed.)

Dear Sir:

Hi there! Thank you for sending along the Nov.-Dec. issue. Could you please tell me when the Harlan Ellison story will be appearing in *Aboriginal Science Fiction*? I have enjoyed the other stories very much but initially was interested in subscribing when I heard Harlan Ellison would grace your pages. Thank you kindly for your attention to my request. (Harlan's story will be in

either the Nov./Dec. 1988 issue or the Jan./Feb. 1989 issue because of our cover date change — Ed.)

Sincerely,
Robert W. Lidgren
Calgary, Alberta

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Here is my \$30.00 for three more years. You are putting out a super magazine. Keep up the good work. I am a frequent traveler (100,000 miles last year), so I do a lot of reading. Yours is the only magazine I consistently read cover to cover.

Love the size and format. Thanks for the baggies.

Robert Bles
Tucson, Arizona

Dear Mr. Ryan:

In my mind's eye I can see that you are holding my renewal check in your grimy paws, slaverling all over the place. (Are you spying on us? — Ed.) Behave yourself. Go deposit the check so that you can immediately start using the money to add more stories to ABO and perhaps (I pray every night on my knees) work toward a monthly publication! (We're working on it. — Ed.)

Thank you, thank you for the baggie protecting my last issue from the postal marauders! I've often wondered if they have a special machine that spindles, folds, and mutilates or perhaps this is their way of telling us that they are underpaid and overworked.

I was so glad to read T. Jackson King's letter in the March-April 1988 issue in defense of Robert Heinlein. Lately (the past ten years), I've felt that every time he publishes a book, the critics sharpen their spears in anticipation. Even my friends and acquaintances scorn my interest in Heinlein. What's the deal? I've gotten to the point that I don't read reviews anymore because I hate finding out the negative aspects of a piece before I've gotten a chance to read it for myself. (Sorry Darrell and Janice.)

Congratulations to Elaine Radford on her story "To Be An Auk." I loved it! She handles the story with a delicate insight into the world of playing God. How far should one go to help the ones he loves?

Keep up the good work and give the alien a swift kick in the seat of his whatzit for me. He has a gift for misinterpreting the obvious — though as an ex-librarian's assistant I must concur with his opinion of children running rampant in libraries as though they are playgrounds. The library is not and was never meant to be a daycare center. (Er, that was Ralph Vaughan and Laurel Lucas, and my response to a letter — not our

alien publisher. — Ed.)
Lots'a Luck!!!

Angela B. Markwalter
Lawrenceville, Georgia

To the Editor:

Please accept the enclosed check for a self-renewal subscription of 12 issues. I am sending in my renewal order now, although I'm not sure I fully grasp the deadline calculation algorithm; the magazine is bi-monthly, yet the deadlines move forward monthly? e.g., if 2/1 is the deadline for renewal if the last issue number is 10, and 3/1 is the deadline if the last issue is number 11, then 4/1 should be the deadline if last issue number 12; but issue number 12 is 2 months after issue number 11?

I want to congratulate you on this bold move: actually admitting to the subscriber the meaning of (well, some of) the codes on the mailing label. AND to follow that up by a (seemingly too good to be true) promise NOT to mail renewal notices? There are so many magazines out there that send renewal notices TOO early, and TOO often; in my early years of magazine subscription I ended up over-subscribing to the point where it took 5 years for my TV Guide subscription to bite the dust. I also appreciate the value you place on continuing customers; too many magazines offer ridiculous discounts and bonuses to FIRST time subscribers, when it should be logical that a magazine requires the REPEAT business to survive. (See my response to an earlier letter about leaving off the coupon and my "Editor's Notes" this issue about our program of mailing 1,000,000 renewal notices. — Ed.)

It's about time I offered my praise for ABO in general. I have finally gotten through all the back issues and will actually finish the January/February issue BEFORE I receive the March/April issue. I don't look forward to the starvation cycle I will enter, between bi-monthly issues, without back-issues to fill in the famine. On the other hand, there are these book recommendations coming my way now, thanks to ABO.

Keep up the good work.

Debra M. Hisle
Nicholasville, Kentucky

Dear Sirs:

Please send me one copy of *Starry Messenger* by Charles C. Ryan. Enclosed is my check for \$11.

Pass on for me to your editors that this last issue of your magazine is the best ever. The slick paper is fine and the art out of this world. Also the stories are excellent. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
R.B. Puckett
Centerville, Ohio

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Well, you have only yourself to blame. Through the sheer bad judgment of personalizing your recent rejection slip you have unwittingly encouraged this part-time writer to continue to inflict you, and your no-doubt bleary-eyed staff, with more silly nonsense. Of course I considered the fact that this personal touch was merely a sharp business ploy to get me to subscribe, which, much to my surprise, I did. When I did not receive anything for over three months, except my canceled check, I was further filled with admiration for the sly acumen collect money for an undelivered product. But before I was tempted to contact my old friend Ralph Nader (who was my counsel when I sued my mother for allowing her 1968 Corvair to lead me to the scene of an accident), I received, at nearly the same time, two issues of your impressive magazine. In bags, no less. (Our circulation department is sometimes slow, but it is sure. The post office is another matter. — Ed.) Shades of *Scientific American*. Eagerly I tore (literally) into this new literary well-spring of American avant-garde. I became so engrossed that only the horrified screams of my wife brought me back to this reality. It seems my two-year-old daughter had placed the mailing bag over her head and was turning an alarming, albeit rather becoming, shade of purple. After thoroughly devouring both issues I removed the bag from her head and considered drastic action.

Thus you hold in your hand a first — my very first letter-to-an editor. A virgin no more am I. Just think, I could have written to newspapers, protesting nuclear war, or racism, or religious intolerance. Or, I could have assailed the President and Congress for idiotic policies and rampant conservatism. But all this pales against the thought of being published in a Science Fiction Magazine. Wow!

Or maybe I'll just go fishing.

Besides, if I can't sell you a story, I can disguise it as a letter to the editor, making your reading audience feel more emotion and human drama than if they saw *Gone With The Wind* — 20 in Sensurround. After all, that's how Alan Dean Foster got his start.

I won't push my luck, however. Bad grammar and digression aside, I have but two things to say:

Number One: More incredibly silly and inane manuscripts will be taking up space in the round files about you, and:

Number Two: It's all your fault. You never should have underlined "try again."

One last thought — Maybe you should label the bags: CAUTION — NOT A TOY — KEEP AWAY FROM SMALL CHILDREN AND SMALL MINDS (Actually, the plastic bag has many uses, one of which is for readers to use to fight the tendency to hyperventilate while reading each exciting issue. — Ed.)

Sincerely,
Damon Wack

To the editor and crazy alien,

Greetings and pleased to make your acquaintance. Just received my first issue ever seen of ABO (March/April 1988) and am rather pleased. I subscribe to all the digested SF magazines (who sez I'm a word junkie? I only have 32 magazine subscriptions!) and ABO certainly compares favorably.

Regarding your change from pulp to slick, I must confess I'm rather fond of pulp. But then I'm not as into art as many; I enjoy a glance. The WORDS are the thing. And I don't care if they're printed on stone tablets or toilet paper.

Okay. I'm anticipating eagerly the next issue/back issues. Hurry.

Best,
Gene S. Byrge
Cleveland, Utah

(The word is always the thing. But art, too, has its place on our pages. The post office might let out a yell if we switched to stone tablets. — Ed.)

ABO,

My renewal is on a Xeroxed piece of paper, not because I am trying to cheat and get the less expensive renewal rate, but because I was not about to cut a piece out of Bob Eggleton's two-page moonscape for Ben Bova's "Impact." Perhaps you should try to make sure the renewal form is placed with an advertisement on the other side of the page instead of stories or art. (We can't always control that, but subscribers should feel free to make photocopies of any of our advertising coupons rather than cutting up the magazine. We don't really like to see it cut up either. — Ed.)

By the way, I love the magazine. I think the alien publisher has gotten a bit old though. I hope his travels get more interesting in the near future.

But the most annoying thing about the magazine is only getting one every other month. After receiving the first seven or eight in one bundle, I can't stand waiting for them to arrive bimonthly.

Here's hoping you go monthly sometime soon.

(Please be patient. We're working on it. — Ed.)

Jan Grogan
Newark, Delaware

— ABO —

Sweet Tooth

(Continued from page 4)

her perfume. "What is it, Sweetie? What's bothering you?" Her voice was warm. It sounded as good as his stuffed rabbit felt when he hugged it.

It sounded so good that he told her. "Home," he said and pointed to the place that was getting smaller and smaller every minute.

"He's still in touch with the base," Jean told Martingale.

"Home," Sweet Tooth said and wailed.

"Yeah. Yeah. Play navigator for a little longer, kid," Martingale said. "Your holograph's out."

"Home," Sweet Tooth said, stretching out his arms to the place where home was disappearing. His fingers wriggled on the ends of his hands.

"Bill will get the ship moving soon, Sweetie. And you can point to where home is and we'll go there, okay? We'll be there in a little while." Jean took his hands down. She held them. It felt good, but not good enough.

"Home's going away," Sweet Tooth said.

Jean and Martingale looked at each other. Martingale's mouth went open with a plop. Then Martingale stared at Sweet Tooth. His eyes were cold and dead the way the stars looked out of the triglas. "Oh, Jesus Christ," Martingale said.

Jean took Sweet Tooth by the hand and led him back from the bridge to the passenger cabin.

It smelled in the cabin, and it was all red, too. When Sweet Tooth saw where the red had come from he started to scream. Jean had to hold him again. She made him sit down and then she threw a blanket over Dunaway. On the other side of the cabin Larry was making noises and his leg was twisted up under him. She gave Larry a shot.

"Dunaway," Larry said. Larry's voice wasn't soft and nice like it usually was. It was little and sounded squeezed the way toothpaste goes out of a tube. Sweet Tooth thought maybe the shot had hurt. "Oh, shit. Poor Dunaway."

Jean was holding his hand just like she did when Sweet Tooth had to have a shot.

"Jesus Christ! My leg." He was crying. Sweet Tooth stared at him hard. He had never seen a man cry before. It made him feel odd in his tummy the way the tumbling of the ship had done.

"Pain'll be gone in a minute."

Dunaway was still leaking a little. The blanket was red. The floor was wet around him.

"What happened?"

"Martingale got us too close to Io's field."

Larry had stopped crying. He looked over at Sweet Tooth.

"No," Jean said. "It wasn't Sweet Tooth's fault."

"Martingale. That stupid, egotistical bastard," he said.

"Don't say that," Sweet Tooth told him, putting his hands over his ears.

"Sorry, Hummer." Larry tried to smile. Sweet Tooth smiled back. He hoped his smile looked better than Larry's.

But Sweet Tooth couldn't keep his eyes away from the blanket Dunaway was wrapped in. "Sick," he said to Jean. "Dunaway's sick."

"Real sick, Sweetie," Jean told him without looking his way.

"Sick," Sweet Tooth said out of a throat that seemed too dry.

Jean didn't pay any attention. "We need to get you strapped in the chair, Larry. Can you get up?"

Larry acted drunk the way Martingale had once when he had gotten in real bad trouble. Sweet Tooth was scared that the shot Jean had given Larry was whiskey. He didn't want the bosses to talk to Larry the way they'd talked to Martingale.

"Help me, Sweet Tooth," Jean said.

He came over to her. His fingers pulled at the legs of his trousers.

"Get him up, okay? And put him in one of the chairs."

"Larry's sick, too," Sweet Tooth said.

"Yeah. Larry's real sick, honey. Pick him up under the arms and don't let his legs drag the floor."

The room was messy, all red and stinking. Larry and Dunaway had made it that way. To Sweet Tooth it felt nasty, like when his hands were dirty and he needed to wash them. He grabbed Larry under the arms and carried him to the wall.

"Sweetie? Here. Right here."

Sweet Tooth walked past Jean to the door. His right hand pulled at the lever that said EMERGENCY EXIT.

"No!" Jean shouted. She pulled at Sweet Tooth's jacket.

Larry twisted in Sweet Tooth's arms trying to get away, but he wasn't strong enough. Not when he was drunk. "Don't open the door, okay, Hummer?" Larry said. "Hummer, please! Jean! For God's sake do something!"

It was hard opening the door when Jean got in the way like that and Larry fought him. Sweet Tooth tried to flip the lock without hurting her, but his fingers slipped and he dug gouges in the back of her hand. She didn't take her hand away.

"Sit down, Sweet Tooth! Sweet Tooth!" Jean screamed. "Look at me! Look at me, damn it!"

He looked at her then. She shouldn't use words like that. It made the room feel dirty some more.

"You'll hurt me if you open the door, Sweet Tooth," she told him. Her face was very close. Larry stopped struggling a minute and just lay like a pile of heavy rags in Sweet Tooth's arms. "You'll hurt me real bad if you do that."

His hand slipped off the lock.

"Set him down now. In the chair."

"He's sick. He needs out," Sweet Tooth said with a frown in his voice. Jean didn't look like she wanted to understand. He put Larry down in the chair the way Jean had said.

"Don't get mad at him," Larry told her. His lips got in the way of his words. "It's just instinct. Get the dead and sick out of the hive. He can't help what he is."

"It's not fair that they're all like that, and they still create them. It's not fair to us or to them," Jean

said. She looked at Sweet Tooth before she looked away. Sweet Tooth twisted the ends of his jacket in his hands because he knew he had just done something bad, and he didn't know what that thing was.

"Come here," Larry said, holding his hand out to him. Sweet Tooth came over and sat in the chair next to his friend. "Don't cry," Larry told him. He put his hand on Sweet Tooth's head. "Don't cry, Hummer. Everything's all right now."

"Sick," Sweet Tooth said.

"I know. But don't open the door, okay?"

"Okay," Sweet Tooth said. He thought Larry and Dunaway should be outside the ship, but if Larry and Jean didn't want it, he'd just ignore that flippy feeling in the pit of his stomach. That was simple. It was so simple it made him happy again.

Larry turned to Jean. "How bad is it?"

"Reactor rupture in the navigation cabin..."

Blink. Larry's eyes were on Sweet Tooth again.

"He's okay," Jean said. "We got him out before the steam started to escape. Probably a sauna in there now."

"Rads?"

"Building."

"Building," Sweet Tooth said. He hated it when he wasn't part of the talking. He liked the talking. Sometimes when they talked, he'd hum little tunes Jean had taught him: "Farmer in the Dell" and "Jingle Bells." That's why Larry called him "Hummer."

"So what about the holograph?" Larry asked. "Without Sweet Tooth in there, we can't use the holograph. How do we know where we are?"

"Sweet Tooth knows," Jean said.

That made Sweet Tooth feel proud. Larry's hand came down on his cheek, but it wasn't working real good, so the hand slipped off, down past his chin, dragging his lip open for a minute.

"Good kid," Larry said. "Good kid."

"Good kid," Sweet Tooth told him. Then he said "Home's going away now."

"Yeah?" Larry said, wrapping his arm around Sweet Tooth's shoulders. It stayed put this time.

"Martingale got the ship stabilized, but we still have a lot of lateral motion." Jean was looking at Larry, but Larry was eyeing Sweet Tooth. He had a silly smile on his mouth.

"Martingale's stupid, isn't he, kid?" Larry asked.

"Martingale calls me stupid," Sweet Tooth told him. Larry's arm was a little heavy on his shoulder. The heavy arm pulled Sweet Tooth's face real close to Larry's so that Larry spoke into his ear.

"Right in here," Larry said, rubbing the knuckles of his other hand into Sweet Tooth's forehead, "is everything a bee knows. So you can't ever be stupid, Sweet Tooth. You're a genius of a bee who just looks like a human. That's all. A bee genius."

"A genius," Sweet Tooth said. He didn't know what it meant, but it sounded nice.

The ship went "clang" and rocked a little, but Larry had his shoulder harness on, so it was all right. Jean, who didn't have anyone's arm around her, fell off her knees a little way to the floor. She didn't hurt herself. It wasn't that big a bump.

"I'd better get back," Jean said.

Larry's eyes were closing. "Right." Then he gave Sweet Tooth one big squeeze. "You take it, kid. You get us home, okay?"

"Get you home," Sweet Tooth told him. He got up Jean got up with him. Larry looked real small in his seat. And real sleepy.

"I know you will," Larry said.

They left Larry sitting there and went back to the bridge. Martingale looked upset. "Get Dunaway in here."

"Dunaway's dead," Jean told him.

"Real sick," Sweet Tooth said.

"And Goldblum?" Martingale ignored Sweet Tooth. He always did.

"His leg's broken. I gave him some painkillers. He's resting now."

"You mean I'm left to pilot this ship with a planetologist and an idiot savant?" Martingale's voice got bigger and bigger until he shouted out the last part of what he said.

"Idiot," Sweet Tooth whispered. He wasn't feeling happy any more.

"Shut up, Martingale. Don't call him that." Jean reached out to touch Sweet Tooth on the shoulder, but it didn't take the pain away.

"What should I call him, huh?"

"A recombinant. That's what he's called. A recombinant. Or you can call him by his name."

"He doesn't have a name. He has a number."

"You know what I mean."

Martingale looked at his console a long time. "Okay," he said after a while. "Sweet Tooth. Where's home now?"

Sweet Tooth shuffled his feet for a minute. Martingale made him feel like he wanted to run away.

"Come on, goddamn it! This is what you're here for! Where's home?" Martingale's eyes came up from the console and met Sweet Tooth's. There was a sort of burning thing in them, like the burning thing that whipped between Jupiter and Io.

Sweet Tooth pointed. Home wasn't going away any more, but it was real small. Smaller than he'd ever felt it.

Martingale moved a lever. The ship did a thing like Sweet Tooth's body did when it was cold. It started to move, but it wasn't moving right. Home was under the floor now.

"No, no, Bill," Sweet Tooth said. He jumped up and down a little. The ship moving made him excited. but moving the way it was moving made him nervous.

Martingale stopped the ship again. He put his hands over his face.

"Home's far, Jean," Sweet Tooth told her, feeling real bad about everything, about Larry, about Dunaway, about how Martingale and Jean were looking upset.

"How far?" Martingale asked.

Sweet Tooth spread his arms apart wide, so wide he felt the stretch in his chest. "Far," he told him.

"Okay," Martingale's eyes went right through his head to the back of his brain. "Point to home now."

He pointed. Martingale moved the ship, but he moved it wrong. Home came up off the floor, but it was way to the left again.

Martingale moved the ship a lot of times, but he never could keep it right. Sweet Tooth got tired of pointing and sat down and tried to sleep. Jean woke him up.

"Keep pointing, Sweet Tooth. You have to keep pointing out home to Martingale. You want to get home, don't you?" Jean's voice sounded like she was mad at him, so Sweet Tooth sat up and pointed again. Home was just at the edge of the floor to the front, and Martingale was going to it, but over it, too.

"I'm losing power. We'll never make it back this way," Martingale said.

"How long before meltdown?" Jean had walked over to where Martingale sat, leaving Sweet Tooth alone. She leaned over Martingale. Her body was like a dance.

Martingale scrubbed his face up and down. "Five hours before we go critical. Get him in the navigation bowl."

Jean stood up quick. Her back was straight. Her face was white.

"You do it. You tell him. You're his idol. Queen of the hive. He'd do any goddamned thing for you. If he's got any metal on him, get it off. In fact, get his clothes off, too. Tell him to fix our position. Override the computer. The steam's playing hell with it."

"No," Jean said. Sweet Tooth had to sit up to hear her, her voice was so soft.

"You'll lose all of us, then," Martingale said. "Larry and you and me, and him, too. You'll lose him, anyway." He took his hands away from the console and set them in his lap, the way Sweet Tooth did when he didn't want to do something. Only Martingale looked sad.

"It's your fault," Jean said.

Sweet Tooth thought she might be talking to him and it made him feel hurt. Then Martingale said, "I know."

"Everything's your fault."

"I know. Does that make it better?"

"I'm going to report you for this, Martingale. You'll get your license taken away."

"Big deal, Jean. Big goddamned deal."

"You should get in there. You should get in there and set the controls. It was your fault. No one else should have to die for you." Jean was sniffing the way Sweet Tooth did when he had a cold.

"I can't," Martingale said, and he still didn't look at Jean. He looked at the console as if it were telling him something he didn't want to hear. "I don't know where home is."

After a while Jean came over and told Sweet Tooth to take his clothes off. "It'll be hot in there," she said. She let him keep his shorts. "You get in there and you set the controls as quick as you can, okay? Quick like a bunny." Her eyes looked away from him. "Then you get out. Understand?"

He nodded his head up and down. He didn't smile because Jean was real serious.

Before she opened the door, she said to him again, "Quick like a bunny, Sweet Tooth. Don't stay in there long."

He felt funny standing there with his feet bare on the floor and his shirt and pants off. He put his hands over his chest so that Jean couldn't see him. His body

was ugly, all fat and pink; not like Martingale who had big muscles.

She opened the door. He ran inside. Sweet Tooth turned around in time to hear the sound the door made when it locked him in the hot room.

"Sweet Tooth?" Martingale said through the intercom.

The floor wasn't bright, but it was burning. He could feel it. He was running in place real fast, faster than he had ever gone. "Hot, hot, hot," he said, touching the intercom button.

"I know," Martingale told him. "Set the controls and get out."

"Door locked!" Sweet Tooth wailed. "Jean locked the door!"

"I know..."

There was a sound and then Jean was speaking to him. "Sweetie? Sweetie? Sit down in the chair and set the controls for home. Put the console on MANUAL."

Sweet Tooth didn't want to hear what Jean was saying. The triglas was all covered over with fog. The floor hurt him so bad he thought that maybe he could fly to get away from it. He pumped his hands fast and then faster, but it didn't work. His feet shouted with the burning, so he sat down. The seat stuck to his legs. "Hot! Hot! Hot!" he screamed. He went to the door and banged on it until his palms got red and blistered.

"Sweetie?"

Sweet Tooth could tell Jean was crying. She was crying a lot. She was crying so hard he could hardly understand her.

"Sweetie, please. We have to get home."

"Hot! Hot!" Sweet Tooth said.

"Do you love me, Sweetie?"

"YES!" But his voice didn't sound like he loved her.

"Do you love Larry?"

"YES!" He coughed. The air was wet the way it was at the ocean.

"If you love us, sweetheart, then set the controls. We can let you out then, understand?"

He ran quick, quick, quick, to the console. He could feel home a little nearer, but still far away.

"Hurry," Jean said.

He hurried. Like a bunny. Touching the MANUAL button was like touching the end of a cigarette. "Hurt, hurt," he said. His voice was miserable.

"Please, Sweet Tooth," Jean said. "Don't you know I love you?"

He knew. He knew because Jean had taken him to the roller coaster out on the beach. From up at the top he could see for miles and the sea had been blue and gray and green. The roller coaster went up real slow and came down fast; but while it was up on the hill, just before it started to go down, it would always stop for just a minute so that you could think about what was coming. You had time for your heart to go up into your throat and you had time for your hands to sweat on the bar. Then the car would start down like thunder.

Sweet Tooth put his hand on the lever and held it until he felt home like a bright knife right in the center of his forehead. He held it there so long he heard the computer say MANUAL OVERRIDE MANUAL OVERRIDE.



When he took his hand off, some of his skin stayed behind.

"Get out!" Jean said.

Sweet Tooth ran. Jean opened the door for him and pulled him inside. Martingale closed the door with a bang behind him. The floor was cool, so Sweet Tooth lay down on it. He held his wrist tight as if he could keep the burning from moving up.

"Look at his feet," Jean said in a tight rubber-band voice. "Oh, God. Look at his feet."

"Let's get him in the showers," Martingale said.

Martingale had to pick him up because Sweet Tooth didn't want to get up ever again. He carried Sweet Tooth to the bathroom, threw him in the stall and turned the cold water on.

"Stay down for a minute, damn it," Martingale said. "Jean!" he shouted. "Get the medkit, will ya? Jesus, he's burned all over!"

Sweet Tooth started shivering. Martingale told him to turn over. He did, even though it hurt on that side, too. He was afraid not to. There was something real serious about Martingale's face.

Jean came in and Sweet Tooth tried to hide himself because his shorts were all wet and he could see himself through them. He curled up in a ball near the side of the shower.

Jean bent down towards him. She was saying "Oh God, Oh God" so much that it seemed more like singing than prayer.

Martingale shut off the water. Jean sprayed some stuff on his hands and legs. Sweet Tooth was shaking so much that his body went bump against the floor.

The spray made the hurt go away so Jean wrapped him in a blanket. He walked funny out to the bridge because he couldn't feel his body. They had him sit in a chair. Jean gave him butterscotch pudding and he ate it with his left hand.

She ran her fingers through his hair. It was still wet. "You're a hero. Do you know what that is?"

He shook his head. He couldn't answer because his cheeks were full of butterscotch pudding.

"It means you were very, very brave."

That made him feel good. When he was finished with the butterscotch, she gave him a chocolate. That made him feel even better, but it made him feel funny, too. Jean always said sweets weren't good for him. He ate the pudding, keeping one eye on Jean, expecting she would tell him not to eat so much. She didn't. Chocolate was his favorite pudding, except for butterscotch. When he was finished with that, she gave him a lemon pudding. He ate about three bites before falling asleep.

When he woke up his stomach felt funny. Larry was sleeping in a chair on the bridge.

"Sick," Sweet Tooth said, putting his hand on his belly.

When Jean looked at him he threw up all over the blanket and the chair. He thought she would yell at him for eating so much, but she didn't. She brought him another blanket. His shorts were dry, but his body was wet. He was shaking a little.

A few minutes later he got sick at the other end, and his shorts weren't dry any more. Martingale took him to the bathroom and put him in the shower again.

"Sick," Sweet Tooth told him in a tiny voice. He wanted to make himself real small because he was ashamed he had gotten sick in his shorts.

Martingale didn't say anything to him. He didn't say anything not even when Sweet Tooth got sick in the shower, this time with both ends at once.

Sweet Tooth's belly squeezed together and hurt him bad. When he was sick again, the sick part was red.

After a while Martingale turned off the shower and wrapped him in another blanket. He put his arm under Sweet Tooth's arm and helped him. Sweet Tooth couldn't walk very well because his body was dancing by itself the way it did when he had the flu.

"Sick," he said when they sat him down. Larry was awake and was looking at him funny. Jean was looking at the wall. They should put him outside, but nobody looked like they would. He should put himself outside, but he didn't think his legs would move that far. Jean shouldn't have let him eat all that pudding.

Jean took a deep breath, a long one, and sat up. Her body was beautiful the way it moved in the air. "I hope you're satisfied," she told Martingale. Her voice sounded sad the way wind does through empty bottles.

Martingale didn't answer. Larry didn't say anything, either. After a while Sweet Tooth slept. Home was a big, loud searchlight in his face.

— ABO —

A special Anthology

To celebrate our continued success and growth, we at *Aboriginal Science Fiction* have decided to publish a special collection of some of the best stories and art from our first seven issues — the issues which were not published on slick paper.

The anthology will be 8½ by 11 inches in size and be printed full-color, full-slick.

Present plans call for publishing 12 short stories in an 80-page publication which will retail for \$4.50.

The stories we currently plan to reprint in the special anthology include:

"Search and Destroy" by Frederik Pohl

"Prior Restraint" by Orson Scott Card

"The Milk of Knowledge" by Ian Watson

"Sing" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch

"Merchant Dying" by Paul A. Gilster

"It Came From the Slushpile" by Bruce Bethke

"An Unfiltered Man" by Robert A. Metzger

"Containment" by Dean Whitlock

"Passing" by Elaine Radford

"What Brothers Are For" by Patricia Anthony

"The Last Meeting at Olduvai" by Steven R. Boyett

"Regeneration" by Rory Harper

While we are selling the anthology in bookstores for \$4.50 (and by mail for \$4.50 plus 70¢ postage and handling), you can get a copy for only \$2 (plus 70¢ postage and handling) if you renew your subscription for 12 issues for \$22, or for 18 issues for \$30. Or we'll send it to you free of charge if you renew at the new rate of \$24 for 12 issues or \$32 for 18 issues. It's up to you. (If you already renewed at either of these rates during 1988, just send in a copy of your cancelled check or charge bill and the difference, if any, and we'll send you a copy too.)

Aborigines

(Continued from page 31)

and "lots of art for conventions."

Jones says his favorite diversions include "music, movies, and rarely, community theatre (like Larry



J. Wallace Jones

Blamire)." His wife Becki Jones is a paralegal and "community theatre star," he says.

Jones recently won first place at the 1988 Southern Space Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, and as a result was named artist guest of honor for 1989.

*** *****

In this column two issues ago I told you about a new contest for beginning illustrators being sponsored by Writers of the Future.

Well, here's more news for budding artists. The second E.P. Dutton picture book competition is underway. The deadline is June 15.

This competition, sponsored by the New York publisher of children's books, is meant to attract new talent. It is open to art and design students or graduates of up to five years who have not published any books previously.

The entrants must submit an illustrated dummy of a picture book. First prize is \$1,500 cash and all three top winners could get the additional prize of a publishing contract.

— ABO —

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We expect our subscribers to move every once in a while — after all, look how much our alien publisher moves about. So move all you want, but if you don't write to tell us where you've gone, we won't be able to send you the next issue. Please enclose your current address label.

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OUR PREMIER ISSUES: The supply is limited, which is why we have to charge \$4.00 each for copies of our first nine issues — they are already collectors' items. Get your copies of the magazine that broke all the rules. Four-color illustrations by award-winning artists, stories by Hugo and Nebula winners. Find out why it's called *Aboriginal SF*. Who is our crazy alien publisher? Read about "The Home System," specially created for us by master world-builder Hal Clement. Book and movie reviews and more. The second issue has an award-winning cover by Carl Lundgren and exciting stories by George Zebrowski, Elizabeth Anne Hull, Joel Sherman, Rory Harper, and more. The third issue features Connie Willis and Charles L. Grant and has a great cover by Bob Eggleton and stories by Kristine K. Rusch, Patricia Anthony, Dean Whitlock and others. The fourth issue of *Aboriginal SF* features Frederik Pohl, Brian Aldiss, W. T. Quick and others. The fifth issue features stories by Paul Gilster, James Stevens and Bruce Bethke and some of our best art. Issue six has a novelette by Ian Watson and stories by Robert A. Metzger, Martha Soukup and a return appearance by Emily Devenport, among others. Issue #7 features stories by Steven R. Boyett, Patricia Anthony and Rebecca Lee. (Please note: Issues 1 through 7 have four-color art but are not printed on slick paper.) Issue #8 was our history-making first full-color, full-slick issue with stories by Kristine K. Rusch, Ray Aldridge and John E. Stith and others. Ben Bova's novelette, "Impact," led off *ABO* issue #9 and was accompanied by great stories from Paul A. Gilster, Elaine Radford and Chris Boyce and some terrific art by Bob Eggleton, David R. Deitrick and others. Act quickly. Send \$4.00 plus \$.50 for postage and handling for each copy you want to: *Aboriginal SF*, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.

Or order all nine for \$32.00 and save \$4.00 and we'll pay the postage.

The Last Impression of Linda Vista

By Howard V. Hendrix

Art by Cortney Skinner

I.

The blast doors are sealed shut and will not open. The waves of the earthquake rolling in from California have jammed something, and everything, unexpectedly. On the device, the timer that once showed hours and minutes shows only seconds now. Again she runs the two hundred yards from the device to the blast doors and pounds upon them, her red raw fists pounding like a heart, her heart pounding like a red raw fist. The blast doors are ten tons of concrete and steel each. They do not yield to the pounding of her life, have not yielded, will not yield.

She leans weakly against the doors, against the mold for the last panel of *World History*. Finishing touches. She came down here — an hour, a century — before detonation, to put wings and feathers, cogs and circuit chips, upon the sandwich mold, above its damping and plaster, above the sheets of copper and bronze and steel and aluminum. She looks down the blast tunnel. The timer on the device is a red blur, too far away to read or even to note its changing digits. Time stops in red light.

II.

The ground shook and rolled under their feet from the underground detonation of the twenty-kiloton device code-named "Picasso." Linda Vista had created another artwork.

"The effect's an old one, really," she explained to the reporter from *The Wall Street Journal* as they walked onto Yucca Flats. "If an object is interposed between an explosion and a surface, the image of the object will imprint on the receiving surface. That was known in Nobel's time. Explosive impression was the effect Evelyn Rosenberg made so much use of."

"Was that the same Rosenberg who sold atom secrets to the Russians?" the reporter asked.

"No, no. You're thinking of *Ethel Rosenberg* — Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. As far as I know, Evelyn Rosenberg's no relation to those other Rosenbergs, but she was the first important detonographer."

"Detonographer?"

"Explosion artist," Linda replied, tossing back her long bright hair. "But she didn't use nukes. I use them instead of chemical explosives because atomics let me work in the Hiroshima Shadow Effect."

III.

"Linda Vista's *World History*," read the press release, "has been commissioned for the sixtieth an-

niversary of the United Nations. A five-kilometer-long series of bas-relief murals to be arranged within a garden maze on the new UN Plaza, the work, when completed, will portray the five billion years of Earth's history, from the initial cooling of the planet, through the formation of the seas, the rise of unicellular life, the generation of atmospheric oxygen, the appearance of multicellular organization, indeed the whole evolutionary panoply — trilobites and nautili, dinosaurs and civilizations — to the present moment.

"Ms. Vista, sculptor and metalworker famed for her dreamlike juxtaposition of imagery from science and mythology, psychology and shamanism, pop culture and religious ritual, will be using a technique she calls 'shadow atomic detonography,' in which the explosion of a nuclear device is used to imprint a final image or 'fossil' onto each ten-meter by ten-meter bas-relief panel. The project is a landmark in international cooperation, requiring as it does the peaceful detonation of some five hundred nuclear devices from the American, Soviet, and Chinese arsenals, to be exploded at the Nevada, Semipalatinsk, and Lop Nor test sites.

"The idea of using tools of destruction as tools of creation appeals to me," Linda Vista has said. 'At the very least, when *World History* is completed there will be quantifiably fewer nuclear weapons to worry about.'

IV.

Linda and her husband, David, a journalism professor at UNLV, ate a psychedelic pizza at their home in the mountains northwest of Las Vegas. *World History* weighed heavily on both of them, and they were grateful for a weekend of escape. The kids were at Dave's parents' house in North Vegas, the phones were unplugged, there were fresh psilocybin mushrooms on the pizza, candles and wineglasses on the carpeted floor, and the two of them were not to be disturbed.

"This is nice," Linda smiled as they ate the cooling pizza and watched the fire in the bedroom fireplace. "So pleasant to be not at home, at home."

"There's a beauty to it, all right," Dave nodded. He adjusted his eyeglasses and ran a square hand through his thick brown hair. "A beauty to it all. Life's pretty good, for an illusion."

They toasted to that, and laughed. The psilocybin



in the mushrooms was definitely kicking in, but that didn't bother Linda much; she was fascinated with alternative mindstyles.

"You know something? While I was making the pizza, I ate some of those dried mushrooms Al left when he brought us the fresh ones and — I know this is going to sound strange — those round dry mushroom caps tasted a lot like communion wafers, to me. Isn't that weird?"

Dave was thoughtful.

"No, not really. Actually, it makes a lot of sense. Communion wafers are made from grain, and Al grows his magic mushrooms on grain, in grain jars."

"I wasn't thinking about that. I was thinking about that book by Gordon Wasson. The Mexican Indians he got the mushrooms from back in the fifties called them 'food of the gods,' even said they were 'eating God' when they ate the mushrooms. Isn't that what Holy Communion is all about? Transubstantiation means eating God. Wasson divided all cultures into two categories: mycophilic and mycophobic. He said Judeo-Christian culture is mycophobic, but I'm not so sure. I mean, look at all those missiles lurking about like fungus in dark cavern silos, thousands of them grown there for some final stage in their deadly life-cycle, some adult mushroom cloud sowing lethal fallout spores into the wind, reaping the whirlwind and the earth with them!"

Dave looked at her quizzically.

"So you think our civilization is secretly mycophilic, a closet mushroom-lover?"

"Sure," Linda said, without really thinking much about it. "We already love the bomb. The Cult of the Mushroom Cloud has become our idolatry, since we only worship in order to manipulate. The perpetual fear machinery of the arms race has replaced God as our shield and protection. If we can't have heaven on earth, then assuredly we'll have hell. In Bombs We Trust —"

Dave threw a pillow at her and laughed.

"No more shop-talk! You've got bombs and mushrooms on the brain. Go worship at your crystal mushroom cathedral if you like, but 'eating God' always makes me nauseous, so I'm gonna go make an offering to the Porcelain Altar. I'll be right back."

Linda stared at the fire. It seemed to have died down some, and she shivered. In our bedrooms, and in what we do in our bedrooms, we are all fighting off the final cold, she thought. My *World History* murals have run from spare minimalism to cluttered collages of life, people, places, events. I seal each one with my handprint the way Rosenberg did, the way the cave-painters and petroglyph-makers did so long ago, then I ship them off to New York to be embedded in the garden maze that turns and twists back and forth upon itself as convoluted as any green brain. So orderly, but the murals themselves belie the order, showing history itself becoming increasingly Dada, any perceived pattern just a dim intuition of order in chaos. The order of history is outside history. That's why I can't be the bogeyman "secular humanist" the fundamentalists hate so much, for I know that if Man is God, then God is insane.

She took another bite of pizza and disappeared in-

to thought again.

The pain of self-awareness is our burden as a species. All our art and science and religion is really only about death. Can meaning survive in such a world? The existence of the science of chaos must also at some level reveal the chaos of science. What relevance does a science of chaos have anyway, when you still have to make the bed day after day?

She saw possibilities at the edges, peripheral visions, but would that ever be enough? As she got up to put more wood on the fire, she heard a toilet flush and music in the plumbing. She tossed a log on the fire and sat staring at the blaze as Dave walked into the room.

"What're you thinking about?" he asked.

"Not much," she sighed. "Just that building a fire is always really only building a stack of ashes. So are all our buildings, all our cities and civilizations — all really only stacks of ashes, from a bomb's eye view, or in the context of eternity."

"Who!" Dave laughed, and rhymed: "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, inside that cathedral it's dark, I trust?"

Linda shrugged, thinking about the universe as cathedral, sheltering a congregation of stars. She focused on one of the candles flickering upon the carpeted floor.

"We're all only candles in the darkness," she said, taking another bite of the now-cold pizza. In the knotty pine paneling of one wall, patterns in yellow and green danced before her eyes, as if the wall were alive and trying to communicate some obscure but important message to her. "Reach as many people with your light as you can, before you go out."

David at first looked like he might laugh, but instead grew meditative in his own right.

"Out, out, brief candle." I guess that's why we've followed the careers we have. I write, and my whole life has been 'a good way of putting it.' My way of shining my light. And you — why do you keep making art, if everything ends up ashes?"

"Artists only make art so they can make art about making art," Linda said with a smirk.

"Ah, but that's precisely it! Writers only write so they can write about writing. It's all a hall of mirrors, and we always only see ourselves. We keep making words and images to tell what is beyond words and images. We need to get beyond them, but we can't."

Linda nodded slowly, then spoke.

"But do anything long enough, eventually it does you. Play the role long enough, eventually the role plays you. We make the tool and the tool remakes us — and words and images are tools. We made them, but now they make us. They have grown larger than persons, and that's the source of our problems. The right and the left are victims of the same malaise, and the malaise is signs, symbols, images, words. We made the bomb, now the bomb makes us —"

Another pillow came sailing toward her and planted a brusque kiss on her cheek.

V.

They had never finished the pizza that night — a wasteful expenditure on a debtor planet. They had once cynically joked that nuclear war was the solution to overpopulation, to underpopulation, to population.



Soon after she had read a philosopher who said that, viewed from a high enough height, even tragedy ceases to be tragic, but she thanked God she had never been that high.

Now in the last long instant she felt her mind running faster than it had ever run. How had she come to this pass? Finishing touches. A tragic accident, a tragic mistake. But even mistakes can be reassuring when they reaffirm the established paradigm. The survival of meaning is the meaning of survival. The ultimate message of the bomb is that darkness can be forced to become light, but to do so requires the manipulation that is inseparable from worship and violence, a wrenching violence dark with excess of bright.

She heard something, a rumbling deep inside the blast doors. A loud click. Motors swung the doors open, smashing the mold. Technicians rushed past her to defuse the bomb. She bolted forward into the desert sunlight toward the control bunker where her husband and children waited, then ran forward to greet her with great joy. As she fell toward her husband's arms, she felt the prickly touch of sharp heat upon her back. She half-turned —

In the moment of aching clarity where madness and divinity touch at the absolute point of infinity, she stared into the dark hearts of all the congregation of stars and saw yet the edge of true light, heard light singing endlessly through the dark cathedral of the universe.

VI.

Time stops in red light. As from an earthquake the ground shakes and rolls under their feet from the underground detonation of the twelve-and-one-half kiloton device codenamed "Dali." Linda Vista has created her last artwork.

Later the technicians who did not save her arrive. The blast doors at last groan open like the gates of hell. The men in their yellow anti-contamination suits find no sign of Linda Vista, not even a stack of ashes, until they turn to the final panel. The mold has disintegrated but the metal panel has taken its mold impression perfectly. It has also taken something else: The last impression of Linda Vista, imprinted in the metal panel, signed with herself, overlaid with her shadow, a shadow radiant against the dark background, a shadow made of light.

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